



# Tamil Information Centre

Tamil House  
720 Romford Road  
London  
E12 6BT, (UK)

**Telephone:** + 44 (0) 208 514 6390

**Fax:** + 44 (0) 208 514 0164

**E-mail:** [tamilinfo@compuserve.com](mailto:tamilinfo@compuserve.com)

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Committed to Human Rights and Community  
Development

**PRESS STATEMENT**

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TIC INDEX: PR/August/99

## **KILLING OF DR NEELAN TIRUCHELVAM:**

### **A CAUSE FOR CONCERN TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA**

The tragic death of Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam in Colombo has caused great shock, dismay and concern at the Tamil Information Centre. Those responsible for the brutal murder are yet to be identified but with the passing of time the truth may be revealed.

This is yet another incident which underscores the facts that an urgent political solution to the conflict and an immediate end to the war in Sri Lanka are absolutely essential for eliminating violence from the Sri Lankan political system.

Dr Tiruchelvam's [popularly known as Neelan] assassination has led -to widespread condemnation from world leaders, once again focussing attention on Sri Lanka. It also has raised the concerns of many Tamils. Neelan, a well-known constitutional lawyer and a major figure in the international struggle for human rights was also the Vice-President of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). He was the director of Colombo's International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) and was recently elected as the Chairman of the London-based Minority Rights Group (MRG). As a moderate Tamil intellectual he has contributed in creating greater awareness of the problems of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka and helped in international understanding of the conflict with the aim of bringing about a peaceful settlement. He was dedicated to inter-ethnic peace and democracy in a politically charged and deeply polarised society in Sri Lanka.

Majority of the Tamils believe that continued denial of basic human rights and the oppression of the Tamil nation have pushed them to a point of no return. They feel that the only way forward is to fight to secure their rights and dignity and to bring about a just political solution leading to lasting peace in the island. As opposed to this view, Neelan saw Sri Lanka as a plural society and reforming the structural bases of the Sri Lankan state along devolutionary direction as the only way forward to politically address the root causes of the ethnic conflict and achieving lasting peace.

As an academic he was recognised and sought after, but his entry into the political arena as a nominated Member of Parliament was not viewed favourably by the majority of Tamils,

particularly by Tamil political activists. In the Sri Lankan Parliament, being only a nominated MP and not elected by the people, he was accused of being the key architect of Chandrika Kumaratunge's devolution package which disregard many demands of the Tamil people and was rejected by Tamils, including Tamil political parties. It has been alleged that his contribution and participation in promoting the devolution package has betrayed the Tamils. It has been further said that his participation has led to the misleading impression that the government proposals are acceptable to the Tamil people, at least the moderate Tamils and that the proposals were prepared in consultation with Tamil representatives. It has also been alleged that his personal relationship with President Chandrika Kumaratunge determined his course of actions and he was not guided by Tamil aspirations. By these actions, Dr Tiruchelvam, sadly, had placed himself in a vulnerable position, in an increasingly violent society where elimination by killing is considered as the ordinary mode of settling differences.

It is believed that Neelan's experience, knowledge, skills and international status could have been used differently by the different communities and more productively without dragging him into a corrupt and opportunistic political forum.

The Tamil Information Centre joins with others in condemning the killing of Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam and all other politically motivated killings, but recognises that the stark reality in Sri Lanka is that such violent actions will continue unless a just and lasting political solution is found and the war is brought to an end.

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