

## Welcome Speech

### A.C. Tarcisius

Director-Academic, CJPD

Ladies and gentlemen, Good morning to you. Vanakkam. Aayu Bowan!

On behalf of the organisers, - the CJPD, IMADR and LIDLIP - may I welcome you all to the day's seminar. I hope you all had a pleasant journey, coming here to Geneva. Thank you all for accepting our invitation and – for your presence here, today.

CJPD – Centre for Just Peace and Democracy, - on second track diplomacy -has its heart and soul in a negotiated resolution to the armed conflict in the island of Sri Lanka.

CJPD represents the intellectuals and academics from the Tamil Diaspora, around one million in strength and we communicate and interact with our host governments throughout the world, with international intellectuals, university academics, church leaders and community leaders.

CJPD was finally brought into shape in 2004. The first seminar we had was with the Berghof Foundation, co-sponsoring. It was a two-day exercise in Switzerland, with 46 peace activists representing Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka, Tamil Diaspora and international peace activists and academics.

Geneva Call co-sponsored two workshops with us – one in Paris and the other in Zurich on de-mining awareness and education, to Diaspora Tamils in Europe, United States, Canada and Australia.

This year, just two months ago, CJPD's Head of Research, - Ana Pararajasingham – successfully organised a day's seminar in Luzern, on "International Dimensions to the conflict in Sri Lanka" with Transcend International co-sponsoring. Dr Johan Galtung was our keynote speaker there. Ana is not here today. Neither is Nadarajah Elango, our International coordinator. Our Advisor and my Guru, Nadesan Satyendra has also not been able to be with us here on this occasion, today.

However, Prasanna Chandrakumar, CJPD's Programme Coordinator, has been working tirelessly to make this seminar come true. In Prasanna and in Christina Williams, CJPD is fortunate to have two enthusiastic representatives of the younger generation from the Tamil Diaspora working for its human rights launch-pad. Prasanna has completed a Masters in Development Studies and has experience working in public policy in Australia. And Miss Williams, after majoring in International Relations with a concentration on human rights at John Hopkins University in the US, readily accepted our invitation to serve the CJPD as its Programme officer. She, along with David Demani, our Office Administrator will help you sort out any problem if you have any, here today. And there's Parthiban, our all-in-one, managing the desk, today for the CJPD management. And on the bandwagon, I am there as Director-Academic, a co-founder of the CJPD.

Anton Ponrajah, CJPD's Director – administration, is here. I wouldn't just call him a co-founder, but the key-founder! Roaming the corridors in the Headquarters of the UN here in Geneva since early eighties, he stumbled on two angels of dedication to humanity, - both ladies – ladies of greatness and humanitarian love, - one – Karen Parker, - the Human rights attorney from the US, and the other,

Verena Graf, a great human rights activist from Switzerland. We are gratified to have them both here today. Verena's International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples - is a co-sponsor of the day's seminar here, and, for which, we are greatly honoured and deeply grateful to you, Verena!

Working on Second Track Diplomacy, the CJPD maintains a healthy rapport with a number of Peace activists in the island of Sri Lanka. When we had our two day seminar last year on New Trajectories for Peace in Sri Lanka, a number of civil society activists from the south joined us. Nimalka Fernando was one of them. Early this year, when CJPD opened its office in Luzern, Nimalka made it a point to visit us, to wish us success. From her college days, Nimalka was known for her unflinching and forthright support for human rights. In today's climate of abduction of journalists and summary execution of human rights workers, it takes huge courage for the civil society activists from the South to identify themselves with a Tamil Diaspora organisation. We salute you all for your courage! Nimalka's International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism, - IMADR- of which Nimalka is the International head - is a co-sponsor today, and for this bold stand – Nimalka, we salute you!

The reality in Sri Lanka today could be epitomised thus! The hope and aspirations that the people had, - with the ceasefire and the rounds of talks that took place, - have already evaporated! They have now been replaced with fear and anxiety. Today, abductions, summary executions, cluster killings, incarcerations with impunity, - and aerial bombardment of civilian settlements, - are rampant in the NorthEast, - some of them slowly spreading now into the south.

Even high UN delegates and officials like Alan Rock and John Holmes visiting the Island have been insulted as terrorists by those at the very top in the Executive Administration. The military campaign in the North and East in the last few months, - causing repeated displacements, - has exacerbated the anxieties and fears of the people regarding their future and land, - with new Sinhala colonisation schemes, - adding to injury. To top it, the Defence Secretary has stated publicly in the presence of the President himself, last weekend, - that the government has decided to crush the LTTE, militarily, widening the gap, - and shutting all doors for negotiations! It is in such a situation of panic and anxiety as prevailing in the island of Sri Lanka that we are meeting here today.

Should the civilised world allow this situation to escalate, is my question before you today. With pundits in human rights, such as those of you here, let me ask for your expertise to pool together ways and means of instituting human rights firmly and properly in Sri Lanka.

There's a usual saying – "Put your heart and soul into your work!" As for me, I would leave the heart with the humanitarian aspects and my soul or my conscience with the human rights aspect. They may be intertwined and inseparable. However, I would plead for your soul and conscience to commit to working overtime here today expecting one to lead to the other ultimately.

We are privileged to have Dr Bertrand G Ramcharan as our key-note speaker today! He is an acknowledged scholar and leader on International Law; a Fellow of the LSE and Harvard, author of 25 books and numerous articles! Chancellor of the University of Guyana! He was once a Commissioner of the International Commission of Jurists. At the UN, he has served for over 3 decades and was once in charge of UN Peace Keeping Operations! Prof Ramcharan served as Director, International Conference on former Yugoslavia. At the UN, he was finally the High Commissioner for Human

Rights, at the level of UN – Under-Secretary General. His mere presence here adds to our prestige. Before listening to him, let us call upon Verena Graf, as co-sponsor to welcome the participants.