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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

13 April 1985

Dear Peter

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH DR. NEELAN TIRUCHELVAM  
IN COLOMBO ON 13 APRIL

The Prime Minister had a brief meeting with Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, the only elected Member of Parliament for the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) still in Sri Lanka, on the morning of 13 April in the High Commissioner's house in Colombo.

The Prime Minister opened by saying that she had no sympathy whatsoever with terrorism or with those who supported it. The only basis upon which she was seeing Dr. Tiruchelvam was her understanding that he was opposed to it. She then invited Dr. Tiruchelvam to give his assessment of the present situation.

Dr. Tiruchelvam said that the crux of the Tamil problem was that Tamils were not treated as full citizens of Sri Lanka and received no protection from the security forces. Violence was freely practised against them and none of those responsible for it was held accountable. The result had been the brutalisation of the Tamils and escalating violence. He himself did not believe in violence nor did the majority of Tamils. They had tried to reach agreement with the Government on a political solution in the form of a viable alternative to a separate Tamil state. Unfortunately the Government had prematurely brought to an end the All Party Conference. He had expressed willingness to continue informal consultations in order to strengthen the proposals made by President Jayewardene. It was most unfortunate that the process which could have produced a peaceful settlement had been cut off. He wanted to bring to the Prime Minister's attention the incalculable suffering of the Tamil minority. They lived on the margins of existence.

Dr. Tiruchelvam continued that the key to a political solution was to find the point of consensus among the Sinhalese

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community. If a consensus could be reached on the degree of autonomy and political power to be given to the Tamils, the majority of Tamils would respond favourably. In his view the reason the All-Party Conference had broken down was the President's inability to push through a political solution against majority Sinhalese opinion. He believed that the President personally wanted a solution.

The Prime Minister said that President Jayewardene was a good man and a number of Tamils held office in his government. It was clear to her that Tamil terrorists had committed terrible atrocities. Tamil terrorists had assassinated Government candidates in local elections. Her impression was that disciplinary action had been taken by the government against members of the Army who had lost control. Dr. Tiruchelvam said he could not condone the violence but it had to be recognised that the Tamils were also on the receiving end of violence. There could be no military solution to the communal problem. There had to be a political settlement. The Prime Minister asked whether the majority of Tamil people really wanted a political solution. Dr. Tiruchelvam said that political conditions must be created to turn the tide of public opinion.

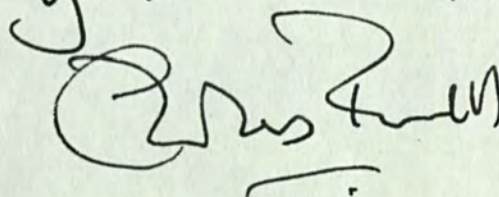
The Prime Minister said that President Jayewardene's proposals at the All-Party Conference had seemed very reasonable to her. Dr. Tiruchelvam said that there had been differences over the unit of devolution but he believed that these could be resolved. Indeed, he had never felt so confident of a solution as in the closing stages of the All-Party Conference. The Prime Minister commented that she found it astonishing that the proposals had not been accepted. Dr. Tiruchelvam said that the SLFP had not been in favour and the President had been unable to go against the majority Sinhalese opinion. Subsequently, the media had been used to foment a war psychosis. The Prime Minister asked how strong the terrorist faction among the Tamils was. Dr. Tiruchelvam said that they held a strong position in Jaffna. People there identified with them as the only form of protection. But they were seen as soldiers, not political saviours. The Prime Minister said that murder was murder, whatever grounds were adduced for it. She wondered whether, if talks between the Government and Tamil leaders were to start, there could be a moratorium on terrorist activity. Dr. Tiruchelvam said that representatives of the militant groups would have to be involved in the talks. The Prime Minister said that she did not see how this could be possible: no government could be expected to negotiate with terrorists. Dr. Tiruchelvam said that he did not think all the various Tamil groups would agree to a settlement, there would always be some who would hold out against it. But he hoped that public opinion would marginalise the most extreme groups. But for this to happen the Government must create a climate of confidence. At the moment the army and police force were almost entirely Sinhalese and were pursuing tribal conflict against the Tamils. There had to be racially integrated security forces.

/Sir Antony Acland

Sir Antony Acland asked whether it was true to say that a vast majority of Tamils did not want a separate Tamil state. Dr. Tiruchelvam said that a separate state was their ideal but the majority were prepared to work within the framework of a unitary Sri Lanka and settle for a wide measure of autonomy. The High Commissioner said that TULF should publicly condemn violence. Dr. Tiruchelvam claimed that they already had and promised to provide copies of relevant statements.

Concluding the discussion, the Prime Minister said that her understanding was that Dr. Tiruchelvam believed that a political solution could be reached if further negotiations were held. Dr. Tiruchelvam confirmed this on the important condition that there was a change in attitude by the Sri Lankan Government.

It was agreed that in any public comment it would be noted that both the Prime Minister and Dr. Tiruchelvam wanted to see a political solution and had reiterated their opposition to terrorism. Dr. Tiruchelvam added that he would have to say in addition that he was opposed to violence from whatever source, including the security forces.

*Yours sincerely,*  


(C.D. POWELL)

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