



Tamil Information Centre

தமிழ் தகவல் நடுவம்

Committed to Human Rights and Community Development

TIC Press Release

18 June 2022

Periyathamby Rajanayagam

We are saddened by the demise of journalist and human rights advocate Periyathamby Rajanayagam, known popularly as 'Tamil Times Rajanayagam'. He passed away at Lewisham Hospital on 17 June 2022 at the age of 84.

Rajanayagam has been described as a 'journalist with commitment and principles' and was well known for his broadminded views on social justice and other issues.

In Sri Lanka he was involved with the political left, and at the age of 25 was elected to the Central Committee of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Lanka Equal Rights Party/LSSP). He left the LSSP in June 1964 after voting against the decision of the Party to join the right wing Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike. He was part of the group that left the LSSP to form a new political party, the New Revolutionary LSSP. He was member of the New LSSP until he left Sri Lanka. During his period in Sri Lanka, he was an active member of the Government Clerical Service Union (GCSU).

In 1971, the southern Sri Lankan Sinhalese youth movement, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), inspired by Marxist ideology, lunched an insurrection in an attempt to seize power, leading to a counter-offensive by the Sri Lankan government. The insurrection resulted in rapidly deteriorating human rights situation and hostile environment for people in the left of the political spectrum. As a result Rajanayagam and his wife were forced to leave the country in 1973 for safety. As oppression of the Tamils in Sri Lanka intensified leading to Tamil resistance and an exodus of the refugees from the island, Rajanayagam, along with other members of the Tamil diaspora became a prominent voice of the Tamil people in the struggle for fairness and justice and campaigns for support of the international community.

Rajanayagam took active interest in the Standing Committee of the Tamils (SCOT), formed in 1977 in the United Kingdom after the state-aided anti-Tamil pogrom in Sri Lanka, to assist victims and displaced Tamil people, particularly in the Northern, Central and Eastern provinces of the island. Rajanayagam became its Secretary and later President. On occasions, SCOT and the Tamil Information Centre (TIC) cooperated in the preparation of submissions to the UN Human Rights Council. The submissions on extra-judicial killings, arrest, detention and torture, written by Rajanayagam were jointly published by TIC and SCOT in 1987, the year in which the UN Human Rights Council adopted a Resolution calling respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Sri Lanka.

Since 1987, Rajanayagam attended more than fifteen sessions of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, meeting members of the Council and tirelessly campaigning for protection and promotion of human rights in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Information Centre was honoured and privileged to award

Rajanayagam the TIC Human Rights Award in 2014 in recognition of his services towards the promotion and protection of the human rights of the Tamil people.

Rajanayagam was the co-founder of the monthly English journal, *Tamil Times* in 1981, with N. S. Kandiah, C. J. Thamotheram, Dr S. Navaratnam and other prominent Tamils. He was the founding editor of *Tamil Times* and held the position until the magazine ceased publication. He edited the *Tamil Times* with efficiency, dedication and integrity. The editorials he wrote covered the pressing topics of the day and were lucid and compulsive reading. He was forthright in writing and lobbying about human rights violations by all the parties to the Sri Lanka conflict. His fearless editorials in the *Tamil Times* often resulted in threats, but he was undaunted and gained wide respect.

The *Tamil Times* was widely read by many people in different countries including Sri Lanka, India, USA, UK, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and several African nations. The *Tamil Times* covered all aspects of the Sri Lankan conflict and over the years became an important information source, particularly in the light of censorship in Sri Lanka and the violent targeting of journalists and newspapers.

Rajanayagam led a full life as a politician, trade unionist, journalist, prominent lawyer, human rights activist, defender of the refugee rights and advocate for upholding human rights. His departure has left a great vacuum in the Tamil community. The issues of *Tamil Times*, published over the last 25 years are a record of the true history of the trials and tribulations of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and bear testament to his ability and commitment. In his first editorial in October 1981 he concluded: "We are dedicated to the much-cherished maxim: Facts are sacred, comment is free". During the 25-year life span of the *Tamil Times*, steering the journal through turbulent times, he stood by his principles and never compromised.

The Tamil Information Centre expresses deepest sadness, which we wish to share with his family members, friends, and the wider Tamil community.

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Tamil Information Centre

Thulasi

Bridge End Close

Kingston upon Thames KT2 6PZ, (United Kingdom)

Telephone: +44 (0)20 8546 1560 Fax: +44 (0)20 8546 5701

E-mail: admin.tic@sangu.org