

MULTICULTURALISM WAS A WAY OF LIFE FOR DR. TIRUCHELVAM WOMEN'S COALITION FOR PEACE

Let Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam not have died in vain. Let us celebrate his multicultural vision and way of life even as we mourn his passing. As with the groundswell for peace that swept Israel in the wake of the assassination of Yitsak Rabin, let this assassination of a tireless and visionary campaigner for peace and ethnic harmony become a turning point in the bloody armed conflict that has plagued Sri Lanka for sixteen years. Let Dr. Neelan's death resuscitate the voices for peace and justice that have been silenced by the senseless cruelty and mindless talk and acts of those who advocate violence to save or defend nations, be they Tamil, Sinhala or other.

The Women's Coalition for peace condemns the killers of Dr. Tiruchelvam, but notes that neither the LTTE nor the Tamil people have a monopoly on violence and extremism. Those who advocate the tyranny of the Sinhala majority and are willing to speak and act violently to this end are mirror images of the LTTE's intolerance, and disrespect for different cultures and opinions. Dr. Tiruchelvam's death should serve as a warning of the proliferation of a culture of intolerance and ethnic extremism in Sri Lankan society today.

Neelan was killed because he worked actively towards bringing about a just political solution to the armed conflict through devolution.

It is a sad reflection of Sri Lankan culture, politics and society that people who believe and advocate that peaceful co-existence among diverse communities is every individual Sri Lankan's birth right, should be perceived as a threat today. At the time of his death Dr. Tiruchelvam was involved in a project on multiculturalism in South Asia, which sought to bring to light the long traditions of harmonious co-existence and rich cultural mixing and hybridity among Sri Lanka's and the South Asian sub-continent's various ethno-religious and linguistic communities. He celebrated cultural diversity. Multiculturalism was a way of life for him; born a Hindu Tamil and married to Sithie, a Sri Lankan Muslim, who was his constant companion and soul mate.

The Women's Coalition for Peace urges all parties in the conflict to move forward and constructively with the work of devolution for which Dr. Tiruchelvam was killed, so that a lasting and just peace might be gained in Sri Lanka, an island once famed for the peaceful co-existence of diverse cultures and religious traditions.

FOR NEELAN

Some are made articulate by grief
others struck dumb

As I struggle within my cage of silence
that unravels infinitely
in a Munchian scream
I promise one thing
to you who promised so much more

The ideas you engaged
the intellectual spaces you enabled
the reconciliation you envisioned
with such courage and commitment
will be pursued now
with renewed passion and purpose

Your legacy will live on
once even we are long gone
from this scarred and embittered land

Malathi de Alwis