

## **Statement by Senthana Selvarajah**

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Land grabs have been fundamental to the oppression of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka since independence in 1948. The theft of resources, land, and livelihoods has however, been quite often hidden.

But there is an urgent need to understand the consequences of land grabs in the long-term. Land grabs are just as violent, building injustice and exploitation into a social system.

Lack of understanding of landgrabs as the oppressive mechanism of the successive Sri Lankan governments against the Tamil people in the North and the East, is one of the primary reasons for the failure of the international community to bring about accountability and justice for the Tamil victims in Sri Lanka. This lack of understanding of land issues as a source of conflict is a result of successful propaganda strategy of the successive Sri Lankan governments to delegitimize the problems of the Tamils and justify the civil war, paving the way for the international community to fail in its legal and moral considerations and responsibility.

Today media and research institutes need to play an important role to ensure prevention of further human rights violations by establishing a regime of truth and to depoliticize the application of human rights instruments.

Production and dissemination of information on oppression, suppression and injustice through critical research, serves to assess the true situation of human rights. In other words, it calls for the establishment of a *prima facie case*, for a legitimate intervention on the part of the International Community.

Within this context I hope the report of Oakland Institute will be a useful reference work for all, but especially those investigating the war crimes and human rights situation in post war Sri Lanka. This study is particularly welcome since its findings are well documented and empirically established and that it is one of the very few investigative reports conducted on land issues in Sri Lanka by an independent research organization outside of Sri Lanka.

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