

PEOPLE FOR EQUALITY AND RELIEF IN LANKA

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PRESS RELEASE

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Hundreds to stage rally at the Capitol to protest China's support of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka and Burma

Washington, D.C. June 18, 2008 - People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL), in partnership with US Campaign for Burma (USCB), will hold a rally on Capitol Hill at noon on July 24 to protest China's unconditional financial support of two notorious human rights violators: the militaries of Sri Lanka and Burma.

The event is scheduled to take place on the 25th anniversary of what is known in Sri Lanka as "Black July," a horrific event where organized mobs, backed by the Sri Lankan government, killed 3,000 Tamil civilians in a brutal display of ethnic violence. Nearly one million Tamils were forced to flee the country as refugees in the wake of this tragedy, and 95% of Tamil industrial property was destroyed.

The rally will also mark the 20th anniversary of the "8.8.88 Uprising" in Burma, where thousands of peaceful protesters were killed by that country's armed forces. Citizens of Burma were peacefully calling for a restoration of democracy when the military began vicious attacks on the protestors, killing over 3,000 civilians, including students and Buddhist monks. This is one of the most important dates in Burmese history, and incidentally enough, the Beijing Olympics will begin on the anniversary.

In the last year, China's aid to Sri Lanka grew fivefold to nearly \$1 billion, making it the country's largest single donor. More than 75,000 civilians have died as a result of the decades-long ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. China's support of the Sri Lankan military, conferred without any conditionality, will embolden the Sri Lankan government's military offensive. China is the Burmese military regime's single most important ally, supplying billions in weapons, aid, and trade, while shielding the regime from international action by the UN Security Council.

Hundreds of people from as far as California and Texas will descend upon Capitol Hill. Members of Congress and prominent human rights activists have been invited to speak at the event, which will be followed by a vigil to remember the lives lost on Black July. Just as the United States recognizes that funding the Sri Lankan and Burmese military will only exacerbate human rights abuses, China must stop providing support to the militaries of countries that have failed to abide by international human rights and humanitarian norms. With the Beijing Olympics close at hand, this rally will use the attention on China to make exactly that demand.

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