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## Opinion

### What place is 'home' for Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese?

'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in.'

*Robert Frost in "The Death of the Hired Man".*

The recent fiasco of trying to evict Tamil people from the city of Colombo, saw them being transported by the SLFP government to the North-East of the Country. In different circumstances, in 1983, when Tamil people were being killed and their houses burnt in Southern cities by Sinhala mobs, the UNP government, while encouraging the rampaging mobs, also sent Tamil people living in the South to the North-East.

The much loved poet Robert Frost has a definition of home that is as incisive and accurate as it is lyrical: 'Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in.' By this definition, Sri Lanka's ruling governments and politicians, whether SLFP or UNP, whatever their public posture and explicit rhetoric, seem to recognise instinctively and intuitively, that the North-East of Sri Lanka is home to the Tamil population of the country, and the South of Sri Lanka is not. But should this be the case?

This view of what place is home, and for whom, when adopted by the Sinhalese and the government, enables large-scale anti-Tamil mob-violence and killings such as in 1958, 1977 and 1983, ethnic-based police requirements as in the last decade, regular abductions of Tamil people in the South as in the last year, and the summary evictions of Tamil lodgers from Colombo as in the last week. But when this same view of what place is home, and for whom, is adopted by the LTTE, it is the Muslim and Sinhala people living in the North-East that suffer these sorts of injury, deaths and evictions.

The LTTE and the government by their actions, even if not their words, are then expressing the same basic sentiment about what place is home for Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala Sri Lankans. The LTTE's refusal to let the North-East be home to Muslim and Sinhala people, and the government's insistence that the rest of the country and especially the South is NOT home to Tamil people, reflect not different ideas, but the same idea, like two sides of the same coin.

It is correct that people in Sri Lanka should have a great deal more decentralised power to govern their own affairs, and this is especially true for Tamil people in the North-East due to the breakdown of trust between the majority Sinhala and minority Tamil communities in the process of post independence nation-building. But in the peaceful decentralised Sri Lanka that we still seek to build for the next generation, let us try to make ALL of Sri Lanka a home, to ALL people in the Country, asserting with Robert Frost that: 'Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in.'

Nishan de Mel

**Editor's Note: An edited version of this letter first appeared in *The Island* on June 16. The original letter is published in full today as the writer has taken issue with us over the changes effected to it for clarity and brevity.**

**However, our decision to reproduce it has nothing to do with the complaint he has made to the Press Complaints Commission, which we came to know only at the eleventh hour.**

**We reproduce it on our own as we previously made the mistake of editing and**

