

Recorded Legal Memory · Tamil legal continuity — MP Evidence Pack

Tamil legal and land identity has been continuously recognised in statute for over three centuries — 1706 Dutch compilation, 1806 British codification, 1947 Ceylon retention, present-day Sri Lankan law. The pack supports protection of the underlying archive (notably British Library EAP1450). It does not ask the UK to recognise Tamil statehood and does not ask for restoration of Thesawalamai content.

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Audience

- UK MPs
- DCMS
- British Library
- FCDO South Asia
- APPG for Tamils
- Foreign Affairs Committee

Best used for

- DCMS / British Library written questions on EAP1450 funding continuity
- FCDO PQs on UK / Netherlands / Sri Lanka archival cooperation on UNESCO Memory of the World-inscribed VOC records
- APPG for Tamils Westminster panels with Leiden, KITLV, British Library on Tamil legal-history continuity
- Foreign Affairs Committee written evidence framing accountability work as protection of a documented legal continuity

Tier-A evidence anchors

- UNESCO Memory of the World — VOC Archives (2003)
- National Archives of the Netherlands — VOC inventory 1.04.02
- Leiden University Libraries — Dutch Colonial Collections
- KITLV — Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies
- British Library — Endangered Archives Programme EAP1450 (Jaffna land registers)
- Sri Lanka — Regulation No. 18 of 1806 (Thesawalamai codification)
- Sri Lanka — Thesawalamai Pre-emption Ordinance 1947
- H.W. Tambiah — The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna (1954)

Policy asks

- UK Government (DCMS / British Library): Sustain UK funding for British Library Endangered Archives Programme successor projects covering Jaffna land registers and ola-leaf manuscripts (EAP1450 and equivalents).

- UK Government (FCDO): Pursue bilateral archival cooperation with the Netherlands and Sri Lanka on the UNESCO Memory of the World-inscribed VOC records relevant to northern and eastern Sri Lanka.
- UK MPs (APPG for Tamils): Host one Westminster panel per Parliament with Leiden University, KITLV and the British Library on Tamil legal-history continuity.
- UK MPs (Foreign Affairs Committee): Frame Sri Lanka accountability work in committee reports as the protection of a documented three-century legal continuity, not as a new political claim.

Draft parliamentary questions

- [DCMS] What funding has the Department for Culture, Media and Sport committed for the British Library Endangered Archives Programme over the next spending review, with particular reference to EAP1450 and successor digitisation of Jaffna land registers?
- [FCDO] What discussions has the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office had with the Government of the Netherlands and the Government of Sri Lanka on bilateral cooperation around the UNESCO Memory of the World-inscribed VOC archives relating to northern and eastern Sri Lanka?
- [FCDO] What recognition does the Government give to Thesawalamai as customary law applied in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka under Regulation No. 18 of 1806 and the Thesawalamai Pre-emption Ordinance 1947?
- [DfE / UKRI] What support is the Government providing to UK academic institutions working on Tamil legal-history collections at Leiden University Libraries and KITLV?

Civic remembrance

The 1706 compilation was the work of Tamil Mudaliars whose names survive in the manuscript record. They are the legal authorities — the Dutch were the record-keepers. The desk recovers the fact of codification. The content of any future Tamil customary law is for the homeland and for Magalir Avai to decide — never for the diaspora and never for this pack.

Pack rules

- Never ask the UK or any MP to recognise Tamil statehood, sovereignty, or any separate jurisdiction.
- Never ask the UK or any MP to support restoration of Thesawalamai content.
- Never frame the Netherlands or Dutch government as a TLTE partner — archival custodian only.
- Never aggregate 'Tamil land lost' figures across centuries. Defer to the Land & Property Desk on present-day land questions.
- Always name the Tamil customary jurists (the Mudaliars) before the Dutch governor when citing the 1706 compilation.

Transparency

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