



iTRO London

Connecting people for effective and efficient village recovery in the North-East of Sri Lanka

500 Sunleigh Road, Wembley HA0 4NF, UK

Tel No: + 44 (0)20 8177 1102

Press Release - Sri Lanka: Crimes against humanity is in progress

iTRO is deeply disturbed by the events currently unfolding in the NorthEast and with the muted international response to the violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law and the “crimes against humanity” being committed by the GoSL. The recent events have confirmed a disturbing pattern in the prosecution of the war against the LTTE by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL).

Humanitarian agencies are unwittingly assisting the political and military objectives of the GoSL, namely the internal displacement and the ethnic cleansing of Tamil civilians from LTTE controlled areas by the GoSL. Lofty arguments of “conflict sensitive humanitarian actions” are made, but, in essence, the current displacements of Tamil civilians to government controlled areas after aerial bombardments and shellings have been encouraged by the fact that food, medicine and shelter are only available in government controlled areas due to GoSL restrictions and the humanitarian agencies’ adherence to and lack of vociferous condemnation of these restrictions.

During previous displacements in early 2006, when Tamil civilians fled GoSL controlled areas into LTTE controlled Kilinochchi these very same international humanitarian agencies explicitly stated that they did not want to engage and provide humanitarian assistance to these internally displaced persons (IDPs) claiming that such actions would only encourage additional persons to “choose” to displace.

Actions that encourage civilian displacement were vehemently canvassed against by these UN agencies and iNGOs then, but, the prevention of the current displacements does not appear to be of concern to any international or local humanitarian agencies.

iTRO fears that the escalating internal displacement of Tamil civilians will eventually reach 50% of the Tamil civilian population of the NorthEast if the current trends continue.

There are currently over 650,000 IDPs in the NorthEast. Over 200,000 of these are the new IDPs who displaced in 2006, there are also 150,000 IDPs still in temporary shelters as a result of the 2004 Tsunami and 300,000 war displaced who remain displaced from the pre 2002 ceasefire period.

There are a further 1,000,000 persons who were forced to leave the island since 1983 and have taken refugee throughout the world. These persons need to be considered in order to comprehend the enormity of the sufferings that have been perpetrated against the Tamils.

TRO Sri Lanka’s humanitarian efforts and commitment to address civilian suffering have been very well recognised by the international community and all those who have worked with TRO.

While the southern areas of the country that were affected by the Tsunami have seen their needs addressed, the tsunami affected areas of the NorthEast have seen little or no progress towards rehabilitation. In this light the promises by the government to resettle those displaced by the GoSL’s recent actions do not ring true.

The pattern of warfare by the GoSL appears to be a very clear one of placing an economic embargo on Tamil areas; restricting the access of international humanitarian agencies to the IDPs; aerial bombardment and shelling of IDPs in LTTE controlled areas; and creating, through a variety of restrictions, a climate in which humanitarian agencies are only able to provide IDPs food, medicine and shelter in areas controlled by the GoSL. Rather than facing condemnation from the International Community, the GoSL has been able to build on these “successes” and has announced that these actions will be intensified and enhanced.

TRO is receiving reports from IDP camp managers and international humanitarian agencies that the new IDP camp sites in the GoSL controlled areas of the Batticaloa District are being visited by paramilitary forces and members of the security forces. The paramilitaries are openly engaging in forcible child recruitment, arbitrary arrests, abductions, and intimidation of the IDPs. There is no permanent international agency presence in these camps on a 24 hours basis and the Police do not provide any protection to the IDPs. There is no one to speak on behalf of these IDPs, some of whom have been displaced up to 4 times since April 2006.

The news headlines from Sri Lanka are saddening for the Tamil Diaspora: The International Humanitarian Community is assisting Tamils with IDP camps in Government controlled areas after remaining relatively silent during the aerial bombardments and shelling that instigated the displacement in the first place; the GoSL is building and expanding prisons for Tamils while announcing housing programs and government sponsored resettlement programs for the Sinhala communities, and the donors have been invited for a meeting to further develop the south at the forthcoming donor conference in Galle.

iTRO on behalf of TRO Sri Lanka and the TRO family, feels duty bound to inform the Tamil Diaspora the world over and the international community at large that an unprecedented human tragedy is currently taking place in the NorthEast and TRO’s ability to respond effectively has been curtailed by concerted smear campaigns by the GoSL and the indifference of the international community. Despite these difficulties TRO will continue to serve the needs of the people.

iTRO believe that a defining moment in Tamil history has arrived and that the Tamil Diaspora must take this last opportunity to take collective action to prevent these crimes against humanity from continuing to occur.

iTRO encourages the Tamil Diaspora to become more involved and to conduct collective campaigns and actions aimed at:

- preventing further aerial bombardments and GoSL engineered displacements;
- encouraging UN Agencies and the ICRC to take decisive actions to prevent further displacements;
- exerting pressure on the GoSL to allow unrestricted access to IDPs and affected populations in order that they may receive the humanitarian services;
- lifting all embargos and reopening all the access roads closed by the GoSL, especially the A9 and the A15;
- creating “safe heavens” for IDPs which only the humanitarian agencies are allowed to enter.

Dr Soma Arunachalam
President

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V Paramanathan
Director