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From:
Dr Dan Muthuveloe
Stourbridge
West Midlands

A Call to Prayer

For peace with justice and reconciliation in Sri Lanka

The dire situation - A cry for help

Dear Friend and Compatriot

Having spent some time living amongst the people of Jaffna recently, and being deeply moved by their plight, I write **urgently** seeking your **prayers**.

My experiences in Jaffna - Summer 2007

I would like to share with you my experiences of Jaffna from a Tamil point of view. I am sure what I have to say could be matched by equally harrowing stories from other parts of North and East such as the Vanni, Mannar, Sampoor, Vaharai etc, and perhaps from the South by Sinhalese and Muslims who have also suffered pain and loss.

During the three months I spent in Jaffna recently, I met with many ordinary people. Many of them related to me their harrowing experiences and tales, which made me listen to them spell bound, speechless with no words of comfort or encouragement to give in return. I could only sigh. I was amazed at the capacity of people to cope with tremendous anxiety, fear, deprivation and the dehumanising infringement of their right to the pursuit of happiness and a quiet life.

After my return from Jaffna I have been pondering about the dire situation I left behind. I vowed to return. Not because I am able to do something for them, but purely because I wanted to be there and be with them and feel the fear and anxiety and humiliation they feel day in and day out. They have no advocate. They have no political voice.

There were days when I could not eat. Not because the food was not palatable. On the contrary the food was delicious as only the Jaffna cuisine could be. I had no appetite after hearing sad story after story of pain from crushed hearts.

Killings and abductions occurred daily. I have seen dead bodies by the road side. They were mostly young men who have been shot and killed. It is usually reported the next day in the Uthayan News paper that persons of unknown identity are thought to have been the killers. Friends and neighbours are scared to befriend the bereaved family for fear of their lives in case they also become victims of the killers. I was told that the victims were young men who were active politically, either when in University or as journalists or as activists during 'Pongu Thamil' celebrations and other political demonstrations. The killings did not appear to be random but targeted. Many of the abducted are given up for dead because so few of them return alive. The killings of these young men have left a growing number of young widows and fatherless children. The 'recent' widows number over a thousand. Last month alone 57 men

were killed in the Jaffna peninsula. Wives and mothers are anxious each morning when their husbands and children leave home until they return in the evening.

The sound of gunfire, shells and aerial bombing can be heard daily. It is not only a constant reminder of the ongoing conflict but causes our hearts to sink. The children are petrified. Some shake with fear. Scattered through out the main trunk roads are sentry points where one is checked for identity cards. If you are riding a motorcycle or scooter, the army may take your bike from you for their use. You will be very thankful when the bike is returned without damage.

Cordon and search operations occur at any time of day or night. The trunk roads [Palaly Road, KKS Road, Pt.Pedro Road and the A9] are closed to civilian traffic twice a day for three to four hours. While I was there the nightly curfew was from 7 pm to 4 am. People are at home by 6 pm and do not venture out. Killings, abductions and robberies take place under cover of the curfew.

The people in Jaffna have no dignity or self worth or confidence as evidenced by the cringing posture and body language and the gibbering apology for their existence when stopped by the army.

The A 9 the only road to the rest of the country has been closed for over a year. This has caused great hardship to the people. Food and essential items have to be shipped to the peninsula. While I did not see starvation I certainly saw malnutrition and failure to thrive and growth retardation in young children. Cement was four times the price in Colombo. There is hardly any construction work going on in Jaffna.

The declaration of High Security Zones by the army has resulted in several communities being evacuated from their homes and villages. They have been languishing in temporary housing for the last 14 years. They are referred to as I.D.Ps- Internally Displaced People. They are the forgotten people of this prolonged conflict.

The people in Jaffna are indeed subjugated and held captive in what amounts to an open prison. They cannot leave the peninsula unless they have an exit permit from the Grama Sevaka and the Army. Hundreds could be seen at the different army camps trying to obtain their permits to get to Colombo to find a new life.

The population of Jaffna in 1981 was 800 thousand people. Today it has drastically dwindled to 250 thousand persons and the numbers are continuing to haemorrhage. The number of army personnel in Jaffna is 60 thousand. Hence for every four civilian persons in Jaffna, there is an armed soldier with an automatic gun or machine gun.

The recurrent heartfelt cry that I heard in Jaffna was the sense of hopelessness and the feeling of desolation. Hopelessness because the people of Jaffna had put hope in their politicians through the democratic process. They had hoped in the freedom struggle through the efforts of the 'boys'- the freedom fighters to some but terrorists to others. They had hoped in every new Prime Minister and President for an equitable solution for all time. They had hoped in the IPKF. They had hoped in the CFA. They had hoped the Norwegians would broker a deal for all time. The International community, the United Nations, the European Union and the Co-Chairs have not done enough to stop the genocide.

I could sense a feeling of desolation, a feeling of being abandoned and lonely and forlorn without friends. A feeling of utter hopelessness filled my heart as well. We

have put our trust in men and horses and chariots with no avail. Our hopes have been dashed time and again. We as Tamils and as Sri Lankans as peace loving people have stood back in horror, feeling utterly helpless and alienated.

Our Response

A call to Prayer and Intercession - for Peace with Justice and Reconciliation

In recent weeks a few of us in England have been particularly inspired to pray and ask God for his intervention in this hopeless situation. God can intervene and can roll back the tide of violence and restore justice, peace and serenity in the land of our birth. We can hope and trust God in desperate times. We can pray for Peace with Justice and for Reconciliation between the peoples in Sri Lanka.

You and I may not have harmed any one but in our name, violent words have been spoken and atrocious deeds have been done causing pain, death and suffering. We need to repent and ask God's forgiveness for the crimes committed in our name. May God forgive our leaders and us.

The book of 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, *"if my people, called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land"*.

God will heal our hurts and pain. God will restore our broken spirit.
God will change our hard hearts to compassionate and considerate ones. God will grant us the courage to accept each other and value each other.
God will help us to forgive and to receive forgiveness.
God will restore righteousness in our land.
So that we will not feel alienated any more. So that we could feel equal with one and all, and justly be proud of, and share in our common heritage.

In the famous poem ***Morte d' Arthur***, Lord Tennyson wrote
***'More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?'***

So dear friend, should we not therefore as exhorted by Tennyson **PRAY** for ourselves and our people. We invite you to join the Call to Prayer and pray with us for a speedy resolution to the conflict and for Peace with Justice and Reconciliation

May we suggest the following for you to consider?

- 1] Set apart a time of day or a day in the week for Special Prayers.
- 2] Use the following as prayer points
- 3] Enlist your family and friends to join in prayer
- 4]Pray with a prayer partner or group
- 5] Speak to others about the dire situation the need for urgent prayer.

Please do remember to pray as often as your busy life will allow. Praying for the situation in Sri Lanka is the least we can do and it is also the best we can do.

- 1] Pray for the **cessation of hostilities**.
Pray for Peace diplomats.
Pray for the defusing of anger and revenge.
- 2] Pray for the return of the **sanctity of life**.
Pray that killings and abductions will cease.
Pray that there will be no need for any more violent deaths
- 3] Pray for the return of **civil rule and democracy**.
Pray for the return of **dialogue**.
Pray for **tolerance** and respect of other points of view.
Pray for the spirit of **generosity**, to live and let live
- 4] Pray for **Just Peace**.
Pray that fear and apprehension and anxiety will be no more.
Pray for the **Liberty** and the **Freedoms** of each person in equal measure.
- 5] Pray for **ALL** aid workers, politicians and journalists.
Pray for their safety.
Pray for their important work.
- 6] Pray for **ALL** war widows and their dependants
Pray for **ALL** orphans.
Pray for **ALL** the war disabled and maimed
- 7] Pray for **ALL** Refugees- Internally Displaced People

If you share with us the need and importance of this **Call to Prayer** and wish to join us in doing so, please e mail one of us with your nod and feed back, views and suggestions if any.

Your Response?

- 1] Write to us if you will join us in prayer.
- 2] Give us your thoughts and suggestions.
- 3] Circulate this to like-minded persons for prayer

Arul Selvaratnam –selvaratnam@mail.com
Lawrence Ratnam- - LRatnam@aol.com
Dan Muthuveloe-- danmuthuveloe@hadenvale.org
Sam Muthuveloe– sam.muthuveloe@hopeoutreach.org.uk

If the uptake is good we may produce a monthly prayer-net bulletin to help us keep in touch and to encourage each other to continue praying.

Dr Dan Muthuveloe

Stourbridge
West Midlands
UK
danmuthuveloe@hadenvale.org

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