

Concerned Citizens Forum of South Asia
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To
The Media,

Dear Sir/Madam,

We request you to kindly publish the appended Press Release and the contents of the enclosed appeal in your esteemed daily/media.

Best Regards

Dr. Paul Newman
Convenor.
13.08.2009

PRESS RELEASE

BANGALORE, 13.08.2009 – A delegation of eminent citizens and representatives of civil rights organisations met Mr. S.M. Krishna, Union Minister of External Affairs here today, and urged the Government of India to ensure speedy rehabilitation of internally displaced people (IDPs) and other war-affected people in Sri Lanka.

Under the banner of the Concerned Citizens Forum of South Asia, a new umbrella group that advocates human rights and humanitarian values in the region, the delegation met Mr. Krishna at his residence here this morning. The group submitted a '*A roadmap for relief, resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced and war-affected people of Sri Lanka by the Government of Sri Lanka*' (A copy is enclosed).

The delegation requested the minister to kindly use his good offices to take up this burning humanitarian issue with the Government of Sri Lanka and ensure relief and rehabilitation of the affected people before the monsoon sets in. The delegation felt that the monsoon would unleash another humanitarian catastrophe in the crowded camps that house about 150,000 people and spread epidemics and misery. There are many wounded and disabled persons in the camps.

In response, Mr Krishna informed the delegation that the Prime Minister had expressed his willingness to donate an additional sum of Rs.500 crores towards relief in Sri Lanka. However, he shared the delegation's concern that aid cannot be left to fully under the control of Government of Sri Lanka, but it has to be monitored. The Government of India had earlier announced an aid package of Rs 500 crore.

The minister assured the delegation that he would seek a realistic report from the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and act upon it without delay.

Some of the other issues that were raised by the delegation were related to:

- The resettlement of the IDPs in their places of origin or choice, as promised by the Sri Lankan Government, within 180 days.

- The Rs.500 crore aid declared by Govt of India, towards relief and rehabilitation of IDPs to be channeled through humanitarian agencies and the Government of Sri Lanka should be made accountable through proper monitoring by independent agencies.
- The issue of immediate family reunion was raised as members of the same family are often scattered in different camps. The main concern is about children being separated from their parents.
- A request was also made to stall the Sri Lankan designs to change the ethnic, demographic, and cultural patterns of the northern region by resettling Sinhalese there with incentives.
- The delegation also urged the Govt of India to prevail upon the Govt of Sri Lanka to demilitarise the IDP camps and hand over their administration to the Civilian authorities.
- The delegation also requested the minister to prevail upon the Government of Sri Lanka to provide free access to international aid agencies and the media and the civil rights groups to reach out to the needs of the IDPs.
- In view of providing livelihood, the delegation requested the minister to prevail upon the Government of Sri Lanka to lift the ban on restriction of fishing in the coastal areas.

The appeal was signed and endorsed by eminent personalities and organizations, including:

Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Member of Parliament (Sri Lanka), Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka; Ms. Jayamala, President, Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce, Bangalore; Dr.K.Sekar, Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS, Bangalore; Dr. V.Vijayakumar, UNHCR Chair on Refugee Law and Professor of Law, National Law School of India University, Bangalore; Prof. E. J. Puttiah, Department of Environmental Science, Kuvempu University; Dr.M.G.Krishnan, Professor and Head of the Dept of Political Science, Bangalore University,Bangalore; Dr.Mathew Aerthaiyil SJ, Director, Indian Social Institute, Bangalore; Dr.Ambrose Pinto SJ, Principal, St.Joseph's College, Bangalore; G. Deenadayalan, The Other Media, New Delhi; South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM), Bangalore; FEDINA, Bangalore; Pipal Tree, Fireflies, Bangalore; Kerala Private College Teachers Association, Thiruvananthapuram. People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) India; APCLC (Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties, Committee); CPDR (Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights), Mumbai; Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights(OPDR), Andhra Pradesh; HRF (Human Rights Forum) Andhra Pradesh; Confederation of Human Rights (COHR), Manipur; Lokshakti Hukk Sangattana, Maharastra; National Alliance of People's Movements NAPM; and Vimochana, Forum for Women's Rights, Karnataka.

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An Appeal to the Government of India

A roadmap for relief, resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced and war-affected people of
Sri Lanka by the Government of Sri Lanka

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has declared the final defeat of the LTTE on 19th May 2009 after a military offensive that saw a lot of civilian casualties. The suffering of the civilians still continues as this 'war on terrorism' has led to deaths, injuries and loss of livelihood of a large number of them. While the overall damage is still being assessed, about 300,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) who have lost their homes or have fled the conflict zones are now living in closed camps. The unfolding scenario marks one of the most serious, though grossly underreported, humanitarian crises of recent times. Though the GoSL euphemistically calls the barbed wire camps of the IDPs 'welfare villages', humanitarian agencies point out that they evoke rather grim images of detention centres associated with great wars of the last century. On ground, the people in these camps have been denied of their most basic human rights - movement, livelihood, speech, assembly and grievance redressal. NGOs have only limited access to these camps and conflict zones in general. So they had only limited success in reducing the suffering of IDPs and other war-affected people.

We are aware that the Government of India (GoI) is serious about early, speedy and dignified resettlement of these IDPs and detainees and in touch with GoSL in this regard. In this context, we, representatives of the civil society in India, request the GoI to use its goodwill and good offices to press the GoSL to ensure its war-affected citizen's basic human rights, emergency health/medical care and resettlement as per internationally accepted humanitarian standards.

We are hopeful that the GoI will speak for the democratic rights, dignity and demands of the Tamils of Sri Lanka - especially the IDPs in camps that include bereaved and/or injured persons and a large number of women and children. In the interest of human rights, good governance and broader regional human security, we hereby request the Government of India to encourage the Government of Sri Lanka to implement a 'Roadmap for Relief, Resettlement and Rehabilitation of the Tamils of Sri Lanka'.

This roadmap broadly covers issues of rights, human security and governance. We appeal to the GoI to convince the GoSL to discuss this roadmap in the Parliament to ensure transparency and accountability. It is recommended that its implementation, including financial allocation, management and monitoring and evaluation, be done

transparently. We want the GoI to convince the GoSL to seek the support of the UN agencies, ICRC and international humanitarian agencies to implement its objectives. This roadmap has to be implemented by agencies that are sensitive to the issues of the IDPs and experienced in humanitarian relief and development work, obviously not the armed forces. Besides, there should be a committee of eminent persons from South Asia to monitor and assess the progress of the implementation of the objectives.

As members of civil society and civil rights groups, we are willing to work with the GoI in this process. Some of the salient features of the suggested roadmap could be:

I. RELIEF, RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT

1. RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT: It is fundamental that the government respects the right of the IDPs both Tamils and Muslims to return home and be resettled with adequate support. This is imperative to avoid more suffering after the war. There are reports about government plans – but no official statement. *The GoSL should immediately make public a plan for return and resettlement of IDPs and implement it without delay.*
2. AVOID MISERY IN THE RAINY SEASON: It is feared that once rainy season begins in the north in September, it would be unlivable for the people in the camps. Drinking water and sanitation would be a problem and diseases and epidemics would spread. Relief work would be tough, as over 300,000 IDPs cannot be kept in camps in the monsoon time. *The GoSL should immediately make public a sound plan for temporary care of people who are not returned and resettled by then.*
3. RIGHT TO MINIMUM STANDARDS IN RELIEF: The living conditions of the IDP camps are deplorable. **The GoSL and the humanitarian agencies should follow the Sphere Standards for food, nutrition, water, clothing, sanitation, medicine and other basic needs, including temporary shelters, especially in view of the imminent rains.**
4. HEALTHCARE, NUTRITION, PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION AND CARE FOR THE DISABLED: The IDPs have survived a war, and its aftermath including impoverishment, and immense pain and agony. Many are injured or disabled. **Hence, it is important to put in place an emergency health care system with well-trained, committed personnel to take care of all aspects their physical, mental and psychosocial health.**
5. LIFT THE CURB ON LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES: One of the most debilitating restrictions imposed on the affected people is the restriction imposed on fishing and other livelihood activities. *With the war on terrorism over, it is high time that the GoSL lifts the ban on fishing and other work in the coastal areas.*

II. CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

1. **FAMILY REUNION:** Publish a list of all the camps, their location and occupants, so that people can know the whereabouts and contact their family members who are not with them. The government has done some work in this regard, but the problem is so massive that there has not been much progress. *The GOSL should announce a programme of action for early family reunion.*
2. **INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEAD AND THE MISSING:** There are many bits of contradicting information about the dead and the missing – reports say over 20,000 people have either died or disappeared in the last few weeks of the final phase of war. *Whatever may be the number, the GOSL should make that public.*
3. **FAST TRANSPARENT SCREENING OF THE SUSPECTED CADRES:** Reportedly that over 10,400 suspected militant cadres have been detained separately from the IDP camps. Recent government statements do not give much information about them and in general there is a news blackout. The condition of women detainees is deplorable. *The names and whereabouts of these people should be made public, and their parents/ relatives must be permitted to meet them on a regular basis. While their screening and trial is done fast, the innocent must be released without any delay. The basic rights of the detainees, and the special needs of the women, must be taken care of.*
4. **SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR INJURED, DISABLED, MENTALLY ILL IDPs:** There are hundreds of IDPs who are wounded, whose limbs have been amputated, become disabled and/or mentally disturbed. Some of them are in the camps, while others are in hospitals. Some are not cared for by anyone. They are under enormous physical, mental and psychological stress and agony. *The GOSL should set aside additional medical staff to take care of these most vulnerable people and provide also mental and medical care.*
5. **FREE ACCESS TO HUMANITARIAN AID AGENCIES:** The conditions in the IDP camps are appalling. Still under the pretext of security concerns, the GoSL is not allowing the aid agencies to visit or work in the camps. *The humanitarian aid agencies, the UN agencies, and the global civil rights activists should get immediate access to IDP camps, detention centres, hospitals and other places where the war-affected citizens are living.*
6. **FREE ACCESS TO MEDIA:** The media has been barred from the conflict zones and IDP camps, except for selective, conducted tours. So the world does not know the plight of the war-affected people. *In the interest of human rights protection, media be given free access to camps, hospitals and other places where the war-affected people live – right now.*

III. DAMAGE CONTROL

1. **HUMAN AUDIT, DAMAGE ASSESSMENT, COMPENSATION:** The war in Sri Lanka has caused great damage to all aspects of life – physical, material, religious, social and mental dimensions. But there is no assessment of the number of deaths,

injuries or damages and losses so far. It is necessary for compensatory action on different fronts, including for land and buildings and farms taken over or damaged by the government or its armed forces. *Hence, it is demanded that the GoSL should undertake a human audit covering the dead, the wounded, the amputated and the disappeared as well as assess the damage - material, resources, documents - so as to present a true picture of the losses. It should lead to a process to provide just compensation for the losses.*

2. **IMMEDIATE DEMINING OF THE CONFLICT AREAS:** The GoSL keeps on saying that land mining is one of the reasons why the IDPs are not allowed to return to their respective habitats. The GoSL has done some work with regard to demining but more has to be done. We appreciate the efforts made by the GoI in this regard. *The GoSL should be engaged in demining with the assistance of UN Agencies and others to enable speedy return of the IDPs to their places.*

3. **REMOVE MADAVACHI CHECK POINT AND INTRODUCE A BETTER SYSTEM OF SCREENING:** Due to the war, GoSL had set up a tight and very time consuming check point in Madavachi. This has led to a lot of hardship to the people passing through the area. Most of the relatives of IDPs could not meet their relatives due to the harassment they were subjected to in this checkpoint. *It is demanded that the GoSL removes the Madavachi checkpoint and introduce a better system of screening.*

IV GOVERNANCE

1. **Right to Governance by Civil Administration:** The entire northeast of Sri Lanka has been brought under the military rule. While the security concerns can be understood, total militarization of an entire area that is of an ethnic community creates a sense of fear, suspicion and mental agony. *The GOSL immediately should come out with total demilitarization of the northeast and should hand over the governance to civil administration.*

2. **Coordination between various Departments:** It is reported that at times there is lack of coordination between various departments of the GoSL. Often departments talk and work at cross-purpose. *It is demanded that the GOSL ensures a mechanism for cooperation and coordination between various departments and the army for redressal of grievances and for effective implementation of various plans.*

3. **TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE SPENDING OF AID:** Many countries, international financial organizations and donor agencies have given or in the process of giving huge amount of money in the name of developing the northeastern region of Sri Lanka. The Indian Government has given over 500 crores of rupees as humanitarian assistance. *It is demanded that all funds and assistance be channeled to a single relief, rehabilitation and resettlement programme that is monitored by a competent South Asian Agency of eminent persons.*

4. **RESPECT THE DEMOGRAPHIC, CULTURAL PATTERNS:** There are concerns that the development of the northeastern Sri Lanka would change the demographic patterns with the minorities losing their space to Sinhalese immigrants. On the other hand, suspected cadres are brought to Sinhalese areas. This would deny them access to communication and movement. *The GOSL should resist all pressures from the reactionary groups and continue to maintain the ethnic, cultural and demographic composition that existed before the war.*

Signed and endorsed by eminent personalities and organizations, including:

- Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, Member of Parliament (Sri Lanka), Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka;
- Ms. Jayamala, President, Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce, Bangalore;
- Dr.K.Sekar, Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS, Bangalore;
- Dr. V.Vijayakumar, UNHCR Chair on Refugee Law and Professor of Law, National Law School of India University, Bangalore;
- Prof. E. J. Puttiah, Department of Environmental Science, Kuvempu University;
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- People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) India;
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- Lokshakti Hukk Sangattana, Maharashtra;
- National Alliance of People's Movements NAPM;
- Vimochana, Forum for Women's Rights, Karnataka.