

TAMIL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS - TCHR/CTDH

CENTRE TAMOUL POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME

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WHERE ARE THOSE CHILD RIGHTS' ACTIVISTS? HOW LONG CAN SRI LANKA FOOL THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY?

During the peak days of the war, a few local and international NGOs championed the Child soldier issue in Sri Lanka. Obviously, the target was the LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which latterly admitted that there were child soldiers in their organisation. At the same time, the Sri Lankan security forces were also recruiting child soldiers from schools and poor families in the South. But this was overlooked by zealous government lobbyists and some NGO activists known among Civil Society as GONGOs – GOvernment Non-Governmental Organisations.

Anyway, since May 2009 - no more war, no more LTTE, no more child soldiers, but there are thousands of children from war-torn areas in and out of internment camps – whose basic needs are not being met. Daily many children are dying, disappearing, abducted, sexually assaulted, tortured, etc. Vulnerable children including orphans are undergoing severe trauma and difficulties. All this continues.

So far, how many Child rights' champions locally and internationally have raised their voice about the suffering of these children? These NGOs had a hidden agenda and shed '*crocodile tears*' about Child soldiers. There is obviously valid reason in raising one's voice about Child soldiers, but it is not the only issue of concern to the Children. These politically-motivated NGOs never bothered about the massive range of Child rights violated in the North and East. One UN Civil servant talked about '*five pillars*', but failed to raise concern about the sufferings of the children in the internment camps. It is interesting to learn new phenomena from these people.

GUN IN ONE HAND AND A BED SHEET/BLANKET IN THE OTHER HAND!

President Rajapaksa and his men made speeches and statements claiming that the Sri Lankan security forces are the best, the most disciplined, and fight with their '*gun in one hand and human rights declaration in the other hand*', etc. Yes these are sweet words for the State media and its propagandists. The reality is, that what has happened and what is happening is in fact entirely different and sinister.

According to information received by the TCHR, Security forces in the North and East go out on duty with a '*gun in one hand and a bed sheet/blanket on the other hand*'. How many rape cases; how many raped women's bodies have been found in the bushes, wells, forests and other places? How many women and students have committed suicide as a result of the traumas they have faced? How many disappearances and abandoned bodies are found on a daily basis? **Where are those NGOs who cried out about violations of the LTTE and Child soldiers? Do they think that what was done by the LTTE was the only violation?**

Sri Lanka is now having great difficulty as it faces the charge of War crimes - accountability.

So far how many NGOs who were talking about the Child soldiers of the LTTE have contributed to this matter of accountability? The local NGOs that made huge sums of money on the Child soldier issue, are today silent about accountability.

Presently the government is talking about "*development*" of the North and East. This is a case of '*violin-playing while Rome is burning*'. The government should understand that 'rebuilding and rehabilitation' are different from 'development'.

SO FAR 200,000 SINHALESE SETTLED IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE!

The government has money to build Buddhist temples and thousands of homes for Sinhala soldiers in the North and East, and occupies valuable commercial buildings which were not damaged during the war. Whereas the original inhabitants are living in deplorable conditions, their basic needs unmet, and schools are functioning under the trees.

Within one year 50,000 members of the security forces have been permanently settled with their family members and domestic servants in the Northern Province alone. In other words nearly 200,000 Sinhalese have been permanently settled there. This rapid colonisation is taking place with the intention of producing two Sinhala parliamentarians from the Jaffna Peninsula in a future General Election.

The government says that the Tamil diaspora should contribute to the development of the North and East. This raises a pertinent question. ***Was it the Sinhala diaspora who funded the development of the provinces other than the North and East?***

Furthermore, there is a curious question to be answered. Where are the assets, jewellery and vast sums of money recovered from the LTTE in Mullivaigal? What is the actual estimated value? Where is the money seized from the TRO's Bank accounts?

For a long time, Sri Lanka has found an easy way of dodging international scrutiny by procrastinating until the individual who raises the question finishes the term of their mandate. UN Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye and Professor Philip Alston made visits to Sri Lanka respectively in September 1997 and Nov-December 2005. Both submitted reports on Sri Lanka - E/CN.4/1998/68/Add.2 and E/CN.4/2006/53/Add.5.

Then UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances visited in October 1992, and October 1999.

Manfred Nowak, the Special Rapporteur on torture visited Sri Lanka in October 2007 and the representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Walter Kaelin made his visit in December 2007.

Ms. Asma Jahangir who reported on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions after Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye became the Special rapporteur on Religious belief and Freedom, visited Sri Lanka in May 2005 and submitted a strong report. ***What happened to all those reports?***

SRI LANKA DRAGS ON UNTIL THE INDIVIDUALS FINISH THEIR MANDATE

Then look at what happened from High Commissioner for Human Rights Louis Arbour to all the relevant mandate holders. Special Rapporteurs for - Torture, Sir Nigel Rodley, Theo van Boven and Manfred Nowak; Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Param Cumaraswamy; Freedom of opinion and expression, Ambeyi Ligabo. Note all the reports and comments by Ms Hina Jilani as Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders. See what happened to the International Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) which was created by Sri Lanka itself.

We must take cognisance also of the fact that many requests made for visits by other Special Rapporteurs were not granted by Sri Lanka.

Has Sri Lanka ever listened to any UN Secretary General? In September 1999 Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali was told that *"he should be concerned with malaria and mosquitoes and should not try to expand its mandate"*. Kofi Annan was humiliated by Sri Lanka during his visit in January 2005. Now it is the turn of UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navaneetham Pillai.

However Sri Lanka should not forget that each person - the end of whose mandate it eagerly awaited has returned to office with a better mandate and stronger position to scrutinise Sri Lanka. Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye completed his term but today he is in a better position in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Sir Nigel Rodley completed his term as Special rapporteur but joined the IIGEP and today he is on the UN Human rights Committee. Another member of the IIGEP Mr. Bernard Kouchner, later become the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Mr. Marzuki Darusman became the chief of the UN Advisory Committee on Sri Lanka. Everyone knows the strong position today of Louis Arbour and Kofi Annan.

This is the best time for the Sri Lankan lobbyist to realise, that what they reject today, is automatically internationalised tomorrow, as they continue to talk about *"the internal problem"* and *"sovereignty"*. Sri Lanka should understand that international scrutiny focused on it today, has reached the same proportions as that levelled against Sudan.

The government is playing all sorts of tricks to get the GSP plus trade concessions back and also to avoid the work of the UN Advisory committee on accountability process.

HEAD OFFICE:

Tamil Centre for Human Rights - TCHR/CTDH, 9, rue des Peupliers - 95140 Garges les Gonesse - FRANCE

Contact person : S. V. Kirubaharan – General Secretary, Tel/Fax: + 33 1 42 67 54 36 - Email: tchrgs@hotmail.com / tchgs@tchr.net

TCHR-UK

Tamil Centre for Human Rights - TCHR/CTDH, PO Box 182, Manchester M16 8ED, UNITED KINGDOM

Contact person : Deirdre McConnell – Director International Programme, Fax: + 44 161 860 4609 - Email: tchrdip@hotmail.com /

tchrdip@tchr.net

TCHR-SWITZERLAND

Tamilen Zentrum für Menschenrechten – TCHR, P. o. Box : 319, 8172 – Niederglatt, SWITZERLAND

Contact person : Thambirajah Genegatharan, Email : tchrswitzerland@hotmail.com