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(Established in 1990)
(UN accredited NGO to the World Summit on Information Society and the Warsaw Conference)
www.tchr.net

Ref : JP065D/PR/2008

17 December 2008

'Liberation' and 'dawn of democracy' in the East

The present propaganda disseminated worldwide by Rajapaksa's government is that the government has liberated the Eastern province and that democracy has been born in that area.

In fact, these are terminologies used by any government wishing to attract the attention of Western governments. But the pertinent question is whether Western governments have asked Rajapaksa's government, what it *means* by 'Liberation' and 'dawn of democracy' in the East. From whom, by whom and what so-called 'liberation' has taken place? What quality of democracy has dawned in the East?

American President Abraham Lincoln once said that democracy, is government **"of the people, by the people, and for the people."**

Is this the case in the East? As soon as the North East was divided (*without holding the promised referendum for the people in that area*), a fraudulent election was held in the East, in the name of so-called democracy. Candidates with moderate views were prevented from contesting the election at gun-point, government-favoured paramilitary candidates carried arms during the election canvassing and voters were brought to cast their vote at gun-point. Eventually President Rajapaksa's favoured paramilitary candidates claimed victory by vote-rigging and widespread violence. This is the democracy, that President Rajapaksa and his administrators tell the world has dawned in the East.

The North East province was systematically divided under the pretext of a Supreme Court judgement, by a President who enjoys Executive powers and is using them to inflict untold damage on the Tamil people in the island. It is to be noted that the North and East were merged into a single province through the initiative of the Indo-Lanka accord and using the Executive powers of then President J. R. Jayawardena in 1987.

Earlier, in the general election of 1977, the Tamil people had voted overwhelmingly to establish recognition of the Tamil homeland in the North East. This mandate, in exercise of the right to self-determination of the Tamil people, was again reaffirmed in the election of 2004. Sri Lanka's democracy is such that these mandates given by the people in free and fair elections are ignored and elections conducted at gun-point, with full vote-rigging and violence, are shown to the World as the dawn of democracy.

Overnight killings in the East

Of urgent concern, is the information received by TCHR, from the East, confirming that the killings, abductions, cordon and search operations, arrests, intimidation and harassment, are occurring daily in the East. ***Below we annex a list of people who were executed at night in the East by so-called unknown gunmen.***

What is happening today in the East is akin to being '*behind the iron curtain*'. In the name of 'liberation' and 'democracy' – in Amparai, Batticaloa and Trincomalee many thousands of soldiers -Army, STF, Home Guard, Paramilitary and others patrol with deadly weapons. They are stationed in every nook and corner. There are numerous check points.

In the East, parents are scared to send their children to schools, women are scared to go out of their homes, business people are living in fear that unknown gun-men will demand ransom and that if they fail to contribute, they will end up either marked as 'terrorist supporter' or abducted. Teachers and religious leaders are scared to teach genuine history and to tell the truth to those in the class room and prayer hall. Informants are everywhere, and the teachers and religious leaders are punished by so called unknown gun-men.

Unknown gunmen are everywhere in the East. At night they walk into any house they choose and interrogate the residents - some of whom they have killed while sleeping. There have been occasions when whole families have been killed.

Key features of the 'dawn of democracy' in the East are these ubiquitous so-called unknown gunmen, the killings they carry out, the absence of independent inquiries or even arrests of culprits, and prevailing impunity.

Alongside these disturbing developments in the East, the people in the North continue to be victims of the government's daily bombings and artillery shelling, and the heavy rains which have caused serious flooding. Even items required to meet the basic needs of the people - food, medicines, clothing and tents are not allowed into the Vanni area. The people are undergoing severe hardship.

Due to international pressure regarding the humanitarian needs of the people in the Vanni, the government is letting a small amount through but only 30% of what is needed. The remaining 70%, although listed in their international propaganda as reaching the people, does not in fact do so.

Latest cases of government censorship

Media personnel who write about the actual situation of victims are barred by Rajapaksa's government. Paris based media watch dog 'Reporters Without Borders' – *"deplores the latest cases of government censorship of international and local news media. In the past few days, the **BBC World Service** has been jammed by the state-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Cooperation (SLBC) and one of the country's most outspoken newspapers, the **Sunday Leader**, has been forbidden to refer to the president's brother."*

The Sri Lankan government should immediately lift its unofficial ban on humanitarian items and should allow International NGOs to work in the Vanni. War victims and IDPs need the assistance of the NGOs. Also media should be permitted free access, without any government interference.

Another alarming aspect is that Rajapaksa's government is proclaiming that the people in the North are also going to be 'liberated' and they are also going to enjoy the same 'democracy' Rajapaksa has introduced into the East!

Sabotage of Tamil representation in Parliament

In the meantime since 1948, changing the demography of the Tamil homeland has always been on the agenda of each government. They have achieved much – Colonisation, Sinhalisation, and Buddhisisation, division among the Tamil and Muslims communities, the division of the North Eastern province into two provinces and now they are systematically attempting to sabotage Tamil representation in Parliament. This agenda has led the government to intimidate and harass Members of Parliament belonging to the Tamil National Alliance – TNA which has 22 elected Members. In order to reduce this number, the government is intending to hold either parliamentary elections or at least having by-elections, especially in the North-East. As usual the government-favoured candidates will win the election by vote-rigging and violence. This has motivated the Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court to issue notice to three TNA parliamentarians to appear in court - two Batticaloa District MPs S. Jayananthamoorthy and P. Ariyanthiran and Jaffna District MP S. Gajendran. It is to be noted that the Judiciary in Sri Lanka is highly politicised – there are many examples of this.

Now we wonder what the next step of the government will be in sabotaging Tamil Unity and the Tamil homeland – the North East. TCHR understands that now there are high level legal consultations, and discussions are in progress among government sources, about possible banning of Tamil National Alliance – TNA, which has 22 elected Members in the Parliament.

The international community which is dealing in other parts of the world with equal or lesser situations than in Sri Lanka, should come forward at its earliest with the right mechanisms to save the suffering people in Sri Lanka.

The International community should not allow another Hitler of Germany, Sadam Husain of Iraq or Mugabe of Zimbabwe to be re-born in Sri Lanka.

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