

Halt the mass murder of Sri Lankan Tamils in the Vanni Area

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Contents of Appeal from concerned citizens of South Asia to halt the mass murder of Sri Lankan Tamils in the Vanni Area of North Sri Lanka.

Appeal is addressed to: Respected Mr. Ban Ki Moon, UN Secretary General; Respected Ms Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India and Heads of Government of South Asian Countries

We are appalled at reports of mass deaths of Sri Lankan Tamils trapped in a small area of the Vanni region in northern Sri Lanka. Both electronic and print media have reported the death of over 700 Tamils in the last couple of days, with only a section of them being identified as LTTE cadres, meaning thereby that a vast number of those killed are civilians trapped in the area. There are serious apprehensions that thermobaric bomb - a bomb that uses a fuel-air explosive capable of creating overpressures equal to an atomic bomb - has been used in this mass killing.

For the last several weeks, we have expressed our concerns about this imminent massacre. In fact we pointed out that the possibilities of almost close to 150,000 Tamilians getting affected was not just most probable but real. We also pointed out that the Sri Lankan Government had been dangling this as the fruit of its declared **'war on terror' as the final victory** - and that the Government was pushing for the 'final solution' before the soon-to-ensue Sinhala New year day falling on 14th April, 2009.

Our worst fears are turning true. The sheer scale of artillery and explosive attacks and the massive deaths of Tamils points out to the grave situation of the Vanni region becoming the graveyard for thousands of Tamil civilians. Now the perceived usage of thermobaric bomb by the mindless Sri Lankan Army and Government has taken the situation beyond limits. Sri Lanka President Rajapakse himself has threatened 'complete rout and annihilation' of Tamils.

Sri Lanka has turned a terror state though they keep blaming LTTE as a terrorist outfit. The brazen and insulting manner by which Sri Lankan authorities have attacked any person or agency seeking accountability of the Sri Lankan Government to human rights standards can be gauged by the fact that several British Parliamentarians were forced to take up the issue of being branded terrorists by the Sri Lankan officials in a debate in the UK House of Commons! Even Louise Arbor, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Rapporteur on Extra Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston were not spared.

The reality is that the Sri Lankan Government has utilised the so called 'war on terror' as a cover to systematically destroy all democratic processes and institutions in Sri Lanka. Government and its

minions have turned the state into a terror apparatus, crushing not just the Tamils, but also others challenging its actions. As a result, numerous non-Tamil, Sinhalese citizens have also fallen prey to the Sri Lankan terror state. Journalists have been the major targets with 19 journalists, both Tamil and Sinhala being killed in the last 2 years, over 35 exiled, driven away from the country or silenced, and numerous publications closed down. The assassination of Lasantha Wickramathunge, Editor of Sunday Leader, a widely respected Sri Lankan weekly in January highlights the fate of anyone challenging the ruling dispensation.

Respected and expert UN bodies have investigated and brought out reports about different aspects of the breakdown of democratic and judicial systems. Recently, on 9th February, 2009, 10 top UN Experts issued a statement sharing the deep concern of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights over the rapidly deteriorating conditions facing civilians in the Vanni region and the significant number of civilian casualties. They also deplored the restrictions on humanitarian access to conflict areas which heightens the ongoing serious violations of the most basic economic and social rights.

We are extremely concerned that in this racist genocide war Sri Lankan government is using banned and illegal weapons and ammunitions, including thermobaric bombs which kills vast numbers of people across a wide territory. Sri Lanka security forces have a long record of using cluster bombs and engaging in aerial targeted bombings of civilian areas which are banned under the Geneva Conventions. Sri Lankan Government has never denied the use of cluster bombs. Across the world there is a tremendous outpouring of anguish and agony at the prospects that surviving Tamil civilians will be mass annihilated through the use of weapons of mass destruction. It is therefore very critical that the UN urgently intervene and restrain the Sri Lankan Government from using banned bombs, explosives and weaponry.

It is very important that the truth about the actual use of these 'weapons of mass destruction' including thermobaric bombs be independently verified and its source of supply identified. If indeed these horrific weapons have been used, the international community should immediately initiate prosecution of the highest functionaries of the Sri Lankan state and the Government of the country that supplied these bombs for commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We would also like to point out that the humanitarian crisis has been made worse because the Sri Lankan Government has banned independent observers of UN agencies, the ICRC and other independent institutions from operating in the war zone. It is of utmost importance that independent observers are sent both to monitor the situation as also to ensure humanitarian aid reaches the area.

The innocent Tamil civilians have been living a precarious life without food, water and health supplies for the last several weeks. Emaciated, starved, severely malnourished and seriously injured, the women, children, aged persons and remaining men are already dying. They deserve the protection that can be offered by concerned world citizens who by demanding an end to the war will also be asserting a chance for these innocent men, women and children to live.

As citizens of South Asia, we therefore demand that the UN and the International Community, effectively intervene to ensure immediate cessation of the brutal and savage war in Sri Lanka and ensure immediate humanitarian relief to the suffering thousands caught in the middle of the war. We also call upon the as also the Governments in the South Asian region, viz., the Government of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives to intervene forcefully to stop the genocidal war that threatens peace not just in Sri Lanka, but in all of South Asia.

P.S.

Appeal is jointly issued by:

K.G.. Kannabiran, National President, PUCL, Hyderabad; Justice Rajinder Sachar, former chief Justice, Delhi High Court, Arundhati Roy, New Delhi, Pushkar Raj, General Secretary, PUCL; Pamela Philipose, Women's Feature Service; Swami Agnivesh, New Delhi, Prof. Amit Bhaduri, Professor Emeritus, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Rt Rev. P J Lawrence, Bishop of Church of South India, Diocese of Nandyal, Praful Bidwai, Columnist, New Delhi, Sumit Chakravorty, Editor, Mainstream Weekly, New Delhi; Tapan Bose, New Delhi; Rita Manchanda, South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Nepal; Prof Kamal Mitra Chenoy, School of International Studies and President, JNU Teachers Association, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; Ernest Deenadayalan, Bangalore; Pradip Prabhu, Kashtakari Sanghatana, Dahanu/Mumbai; Prashant Bhushan, Advocate, Supreme Court, New Delhi, M.G. Devasahayam IAS (Retd), Chennai, Sukumar Murlidharan, Journalist, New Delhi, Rev. Dhyanchand Carr, Madurai, Henri Tiphagne, People's Watch, Madurai, MSS Pandian, Chennai, Sushil Pyakurel, Former Commissioner, Human Rights Commission of Nepal, Kathmandu, Mubashir Hasan, Lahore, Pakistan and others

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