

Army massacres Tamil orphans in Sri Lanka

Tuesday 22 August 2006, by [WILLIAMS Kerry](#) (Date first published: 23 August 2006).

On August 14, the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) bombed the Sencholai children's home in the Mullaithivu district, killing at least 61 Tamil students and injuring hundreds of others. Students from up to 18 schools in the region had been attending the centre for first-aid training. Most of those killed were orphans under the age of 15 who had lost their parents during the devastating December 2004 tsunami.

N.R. Wickiramasingham, from the Melbourne-based human rights group Justice and Freedom for Ceylon Tamils, told Green Left Weekly that "Because we face so many difficulties, every citizen must learn first aid. After the training camp the students wanted to return to their normal classes. But they were killed."

The Sri Lankan government has attempted to evade responsibility for the slaughter, claiming that it only bombed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) targets. Yet it can't get away with such claims, Wickiramasingham said, "because so many NGOs and others visited the scene and witnessed it".

Ulf Henricsson, head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, told Sri Lankan MTV television that monitors who visited the site of the air strikes found no evidence of weapons or LTTE military infrastructure in the area. They did, however, find at least 10 bomb craters and an unexploded bomb from the SLA's attack. "This was not a military installation", he said.

Wickiramasingham highlighted the hypocrisy of the Sri Lankan government for its frequent allegations that Tamil children are being trained for war. "But how can they kill children?" He added that there are foreign diplomats in Sri Lanka from some 25 countries, but "they have not sent the right message to their governments".

The August 14 air attacks are part of a new offensive by the SLA in recent months that has left a 2002 ceasefire agreement with the LTTE in tatters.

On August 4, 17 young Tamils from Action Against Hunger were executed. The workers had been assisting displaced people in the area, including providing access to water. Fifteen of the bodies were found, mostly face down, in their office in Muttur, and the other two had been shot while trying to escape. Relatives of the victims blamed the SLA.

Ponuthurai Yogarajah, whose son was one of those killed, had lost another son in January when Sri Lankan special forces killed several students on Trincomalee beach. "There is no use in living. Better to have died before them", he told Reuters.

A series of killings occurred in early August in Muttur, including more than 20 people left dead when the SLA bombed two Muslim colleges where people were seeking refuge after fighting broke out in the area between the SLA and the LTTE.

Wickiramasingham also expressed concerns after speaking by phone to students in Jaffna. "Hundreds of university students are missing from Jaffna universities. They said the army lifted the curfew for a few hours and then took the students away."

The latest attacks have sparked a growing humanitarian crisis. "More than 100,000 Tamils are homeless and starving, but the government is not supplying food. The army is blocking food, while people are living under the trees, without enough water, shelter and medicine."

According to Wickiramasingham, the aim of the latest offensive is simple: "The Sri Lankan Army wants to wipe out the Tamil people." The Sri Lankan elite is united in this goal, he said. "The Tamils want to live peacefully in their traditional Tamil homelands with justice and freedom."

After the latest massacres, "the peace process is gone", Wickiramasingham said. "Tamils patiently waited for justice and freedom after signing the ceasefire peace accord. Several rounds of talks took place and a number of promises were made by the Sri Lankan government. But nothing happened."

Wickiramasingham told GLW that during the so-called ceasefire the SLA was shelling Tamil areas, imposing curfews and killing innocent people. "Several hundred people went missing; school children were arrested. Rape and sexual abuse took place and innocent people were killed. How can the Tamil community in Ceylon and expatriates trust the government? The United Nations and UNICEF must take immediate action over the orphans' brutal killing by the SLA."

According to Wickiramasingham, "Without the LTTE, there are no Tamils. Tamils would all be killed." The LTTE formed more than two-decades ago to lead the struggle for Tamil self-determination. Wickiramasingham explained that the Tamil Tigers' current goal is "to bring autonomy" and to ensure the Sri Lankan government "accepts justice and the democratic way. Freedom and justice is what Tamils want."

The SLA's brutal escalation of the conflict has consolidated support for the LTTE, Wickiramasingham said. "Each and every Tamil will now say they are Tigers."

Wickiramasingham made a special appeal to the Australian government to take immediate action to help stop the violence. "There are more than 50,000 Tamils in Australia. Each and every one of us is affected - we all have relatives who were killed there." He called on the Coalition government, the Labor Party and "all parliamentarians and political party leaders to pressure the Sri Lankan government to go for peace talks and settle the problem as soon as possible".

Wickiramasingham concluded by calling on the federal government, in light of the current situation, to urgently reconsider the refugee applications of Tamils living in Australia, many of whom have been here for many years but are yet to be granted permanent visas. He called for a special humanitarian program for Sri Lankans, to allow more refugees to come to Australia

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