



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils

15 April 2009

Civilians fear for their lives due to impending Sri Lankan offensive into the "Safe Zone"

All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils (APPG-T) join the Co-Chairs in their calls for an immediate ceasefire in Sri Lanka. We want an immediate and permanent ceasefire and not a humanitarian pause.

Medical staff and the civilians in the conflict zone fear that the Sri Lankan military is planning a major offensive into the safe zone in the next few days. Given the Sri Lankan military's behavior during the past week, including the deployment of internationally banned chemical weapons on civilians, there is a well founded fear that a large number of civilians will be killed.

It is reported even after the 48 hour 'ceasefire' that was unilaterally declared by Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) today there had been artillery fire from the forces into the 'no fire zone'. Photos of injured civilians including very young children have appeared.

Members of the APPG-T have been trying to speak to someone within the conflict zone to get first hand information. Yesterday, we managed to speak with Dr. T. Varatharajah, Regional Director of Health Services in Mullaitivu. Dr Rajah was able to confirm that there are more than 300,000 civilians within the no-fire zone, whilst the Government of Sri Lanka report figures almost one third this number. There is an acute shortage of medicines and there are no antibiotics available. There is a grave risk that diseases will spread, particularly amongst young children, due to lack of proper sanitation and drinking water. Dr Rajah also confirmed that the Sri Lankan forces are firing 800m from the makeshift hospital, "I can see them with my bare eyes - Yet they are using RPG and firing at us", he informed us. Still, the indiscriminate aerial bombardment and shelling continues, targeting the visible safe zone and the civilians living there. There is a desperate need to call for permanent ceasefire at the UN Security Council.

Despite calls from International Community the Government of Sri Lanka refuses to show distinction between civilians and armed combatants. The humanitarian crisis in Vanni has already gone beyond the crisis level and tens of thousands of innocent Tamil civilians are at immediate risk of being slaughtered.

APPG-T appreciates that the Foreign Secretary has been calling for a humanitarian ceasefire at many occasions in the recent past. However we now urge our government to take this very serious issue to the UN Security Council to pass a Resolution that will cover the following:

1. An immediate, permanent, internationally monitored ceasefire
2. Unfettered access by international humanitarian organisations and the UN
3. An unimpeded flow of humanitarian relief, especially adequate food and medicine, to the civilians in the conflict zone
4. Full and immediate access to the 'safe zone' for the international media.



We fear any further delay in action will result in even greater loss of innocent civilian lives especially the lives of the children.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'V Sharma'.

Virendra Sharma MP
Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils