



British Tamils Forum

165 Wimbledon Broadway
London SW19 1NE
Tel: +44(0) 20 8 808 0674
Email: admin@tamilsforum.com
www.tamilsforum.com

23 February 2009

Mr. Ban Ki-Moon
Secretary General,
United Nations Headquarters
S-3800
New York, NY 10017
USA

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

We, the British Tamils Forum representing 84 Tamil organizations in the UK, are writing to you to express our deep felt disappointment and outrage at the behavior and statements of the United Nations, its representatives and the institution as a whole.

From the time in September 2008 that the UN left the Vanni area in the North on the orders of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), without protest and using the excuse of “security”, the UN has failed to live up to its responsibility to protect civilians in the war zone.

The 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the LTTE controlled Vanni are facing a catastrophic levels humanitarian situation. Repeated and indiscriminate shelling and bombing by the Sri Lanka Army and Air Force has killed over 2000 persons and injured more than 7000. These attacks have also targeted hospitals, which have been shelled and bombed over 20 times, and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps.

Government Health officials and the ICRC have estimated that an average of 40 civilians are being killed each day both inside and outside the “safe zone” that the GoSL unilaterally declared. Hundreds more are being injured and denied medicine and medical attention due to the embargo on medicines that the GoSL has imposed.

In addition to these targeted attacks on hospitals and indiscriminate attacks on civilians the GoSL has placed a humanitarian blockade and media blackout on the Vanni. All humanitarian relief has been blocked for the past month, access by the international humanitarian community has been denied since September 2008 and the media has been prohibited from entering the Vanni since January 2007. The denial of humanitarian access and humanitarian relief is a violation of international humanitarian law.

Of special concern to BTF members and the Tamil Diaspora are the reports from Human Rights Watch and other organizations that the GoSL has established internment/concentration camps where they plan to keep the Tamil IDPs for up to 3 years and that during the “screening process” for IDPs that arrive from the LTTE controlled areas relatives report that hundreds of men and women, some of whom are only teenagers, have been taken into secret detention. Those detained, as well as those in the concentration camps, are being subjected to torture, rape, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial execution. The GoSL refuses to allow international observers access to this “screening process” to monitor the process and as a result the fate of those detained is unknown. The GoSL atrocious human rights record is well known and well documented and thus the fate of those detained is of immense concern to the Tamil Diaspora.

Particularly disappointing has been lack of the serious involvement and interest emanating from the Office of the Secretary General. The Secretary General has been largely silent regarding the high rate of civilian casualties in this conflict, has refused to put the topic of Sri Lanka on the Security Council's agenda, and no one in the UN has called for a ceasefire, humanitarian or otherwise. In other conflicts in recent times where the level of civilian casualties has been far lower; such as Gaza, Darfur, or the Democratic Republic of Congo; the Secretary General, the UN, and the international community have been quick to call for a ceasefire and the issue has been promptly brought to the notice of the Security Council.

The visit of Sir John Holmes, Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to Sri Lanka this past week has also dismayed the Tamils in Sri Lanka and the Tamil Diaspora. The Under Secretary's visit is being viewed as a "white wash" of the atrocities being committed by the GoSL. His statements at the press conference in Colombo were, in some cases, the complete opposite of the ground reality, for example the statement that there was "good cooperation" between the GoSL and UN agencies in the assistance provided to the IDPs is patently false. The GoSL has in reality hindered and intimidated the UN at every turn, revoking work visas and throwing out of the country those who are critical of the government or outspoken about the conditions faced by the IDPs.

Additionally, Sir John Holmes, like many UN dignitaries before him – Secretary General Kofi Annan and Tsunami Special Envoy Bill Clinton to name but two – failed to travel to the LTTE controlled areas where the majority of the war affected population are located. He was unable to bear witness to the immense suffering that the GoSL has caused through its usage of food and medicine as a weapon of war and its targeted bombing and shelling of hospitals and civilians settlements with the intent to force the IDPs to move into GoSL controlled areas. Instead he was taken on a government-controlled tour of camps and hospitals where questions of the accuracy and independence of the translations of IDP interviews he received have arisen.

The majority of the Tamil people and the Tamils in the LTTE controlled Vanni do not trust the GoSL to safeguard their lives or their futures. The vast majority of those still in the LTTE controlled areas do not wish to come to the GoSL controlled areas where they will be subjected to rape, torture, extrajudicial executions and disappearances and those that survive this would be placed in de facto internment/concentration camps where they would essentially be prisoners.

British Tamils Forum, on behalf of the Tamils in the Vanni and the Tamil Diaspora, request that the UN and the International Community:

- 1. Call for an immediate ceasefire in Sri Lanka and initiate peace talks;**
- 2. Require that Sri Lanka allow all necessary humanitarian assistance and access by international humanitarian organizations and UN Agencies to the Vanni;**
- 3. Put the Sri Lanka on the Security Council's Agenda;**
- 4. Urge the GoSL to allow an international human rights monitoring mission under the auspices of the UN High Commissioner for Human Right.**

Sincerely,

Mr. Nathan Kumar
Chairman
British Tamils Forum