

AUSTRALASIAN FEDERATION OF TAMIL ASSOCIATIONS INC.

PO Box 382, Mawson, ACT 2607, Australia

E-mail: chair.afta@gmail.com

Media Release

12 September 2008

Sri Lanka Escalates Genocide of the Tamil Nation

The Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations (AFTA), the peak body representing the Tamil Australians, considers the Sri Lankan Government directive given to all the local and international relief workers, including UN and Red Cross staff to vacate the Tamil controlled Wanni region within a week, as a deliberate act to escalate its genocide of the Tamil people.

Due to the intensified military operations by the Sri Lankan security forces in the Wanni region, the number of Tamils displaced in the region, have reached close to 200,000. The presence of NGOs in this region previously acted as a deterrent to callous military operations of the Sri Lankan security forces and provided emergency assistance essential for the very survival of the Tamil people.

The Sri Lankan government this week instructed the International Non Government Organisations (INGOs) and relief agencies to move out from Wanni with immediate effect. As a result, as reported by Tamilnet, vehicles with foreign aid workers of OXFAM, Save the Children, World Vision, Danish Refugee Council, ZOA, International Organisation of Migration (IOM) and a group of persons belonging to UN agencies were lined up on 10th September at Oamantai along the border of Tamil and government controlled territories. Meanwhile, a UN spokesman in Colombo confirmed that they have started to pull out from Wanni, but declined to give the time-frame chosen for the total pull-out.

As soon as the foreign aid workers started moving out of the area, Sri Lankan Air Force Kfir bombers attacked Kilinochchi town on Wednesday, 10th September around 7:00am, reported Tamilnet. This indiscriminate attack is reported to have resulted in wounding a 90-year-old man, a 11-year-old boy and damage to 23 houses. A 23-year-old pregnant mother had to be operated due to fetal death caused by the bombardment and a 1-year-old child was admitted to the hospital in an unconscious state, medical sources said. The attack has taken place at the heart of the town where NGO offices, residences, civilian facilities and other offices are located. The Sri Lankan bombers fired 16 bombs and deployed lethal air bursts, causing wide destruction according to Tamilnet.

The London-based rights group Amnesty International have said that the "Sri Lankan government lacked the capacity to provide basic essentials and safety for those who have had to flee deeper into rebel-held territory". "Without independent monitors in the region, there will be a complete void of information," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Director. "Aid agencies provided a lifeline to tens of thousands of trapped civilians. If aid workers are pulled out of the region, food, shelter and sanitation supplies have even less chance of reaching civilians most in need. Independent monitors are essential to help ensure that basic necessities are reaching those in need, without discrimination. Without independent monitors in the region, there will be a complete void of information about any casualties or the state of shelters," said Sam Zarifi.

Amnesty International have called on the Sri Lankan government to allow independent international monitors into Wanni to oversee and ensure that convoys with food, medical and other essential supplies enter into the area, as well oversee the distribution of such supplies.

AUSTRALASIAN FEDERATION OF TAMIL ASSOCIATIONS INC.

PO Box 382, Mawson, ACT 2607, Australia

E-mail: chair.afta@gmail.com

All Party Parliamentary Groups for Tamils in the British House of Commons, who have always taken a keen interest on Tamils' affairs, have demanded the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to not only to issue a public condemnation, but also to follow up with firm actions including UN sanctions.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed his deep concern on 9th of September, over escalating violence in northern Sri Lanka and the humanitarian impact of the clashes, on civilians. In a statement, Mr. Ban “reminds all concerned of their responsibility to take active steps to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of civilians, allowing humanitarian organizations to do their work in safety, as well as to reach persons affected by the fighting who need humanitarian assistance.” In his statement, Mr. Ban pointed to the need to follow international humanitarian law, particularly the principle of proportionality and the selection of military targets. He emphasizes strongly the importance of a negotiated settlement to the political problems facing Sri Lanka.

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the peak NGO body in Australia has asked the Australian government to help bring the parties to the conflict back to the negotiation table. ACFID's Executive Director, Paul O'Callaghan, says the Australian government should also publicly urge the Sri Lankan government to ensure innocent civilians have access to humanitarian aid.

AFTA is deeply disturbed over the continuing silence maintained by the Rudd Labor Government,

- *wishes to draw their urgent attention to the doctrine of “Responsibility to protect (R-2-P), that is being promoted by the International Crisis Group headed by the former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and accepted by more than 150 Heads of state at the United Nations,*
- *appeals in earnest to take appropriate diplomatic steps to prevent another Rwandan like situation developing in Thamil Eelam, the homeland of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka and*
- *appeals to the Australian and international media to take every effort to penetrate the censorship imposed by the failed state of Sri Lanka on reporting on the humanitarian plight of the oppressed Tamil nation in Sri Lanka.*

Media inquiries:

Sydney: Dr. Victor Rajakulendran 0402 484 209

Melbourne: Mr. Murugesu Paramanathan 0408 360 865

Canberra: Dr. Raga Ragavan 0402 387 920