



MERCY MISSION

S.Pooranachandren (Director)



Dr. V. Paramanathan (Director)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

05 JUNE 2009

18:00 GMT

RE: Detention of Mercy Mission Ship by the Sri Lanka Navy

Current Situation:

It is with regret that Mercy Mission (UK) learns that the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) detained the Mercy Mission ship the MV "Captain Ali" (IMO: 6619920) on 04 June 2009.

Mercy Mission (UK) understands that the Sri Lanka Navy allege that the MV Captain Ali is not in compliance with the *International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code*. If this is the case and the non-Mercy Mission persons responsible for this compliance did not fulfill their responsibilities and handle these matters in the appropriate, professional manner, Mercy Mission (UK) apologizes.

But, Mercy Mission (UK) wishes to categorically state that the Government of Sri Lanka and the President of Sri Lanka have been notified of the Mercy Mission ship and the project to assist the 300,000 internally displaced persons living in the camps in the North on a number of occasions:

- On 22 April 2009, a letter addressed to the President of Sri Lanka describing the Mercy Mission Project was presented to the Sri Lanka High Commission in London;
- On 27 May 2009, in informal conversations at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Arjunan Ethriveerasingam discussed the Mercy Mission ship MV Captain Ali with Hon. Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe and Hon Ambassador to the United Nations Dayan Jayatillake;
- On 31 May 2009, Mercy Mission faxed and emailed letters notifying the GoSL of the ships arrival later in the week to:
 - Mr. S. Ganegama Arachchi, Chief of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
 - Honourable Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe;
 - Honourable Minister of Abdul Risath Bathiyutheen, Ministry of Resettlement & Disaster Relief Services;
 - Dr. Palitha T.B. Kohona, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Mercy Mission (UK) is also disturbed and concerned to learn of the arrest and continuing detention by the Criminal Investigation Division (C.I.D.) of the consignee of the goods in Colombo, Mr. Arumugam Athmanathan, President/CEO, SAI International Associates. Mr. Athmanathan is a diabetic and it is reported that he is being denied access to his insulin medication. He has been held for over 36 hours thus far.

Events:

- 04:10 hours (Sri Lanka Time), 04 June 2009: while in international waters (GPS coordinates: 07 06.0n 079 23.5e) approximately 30 miles away from the Sri Lanka coastline, the MV Captain Ali was hailed by the Sri Lanka Navy and “asked” to move into Sri Lankan waters.
- 05:10 hours: Five (5) vessels of the Sri Lanka Navy intercepted the MV Captain Ali in international waters and escorted her to the anchorage in Sri Lankan waters.
- 09:30 hours: The MV Captain Ali anchors where ordered to do so by the Sri Lanka Navy (GPS coordinates: 06 52n 079 49e). Thirteen (13) members of the Sri Lanka Navy board the ship and, in a professional and courteous manner, search it from stem to stern checking the passports of all those onboard as well as the ship’s papers. They find that, as stated repeatedly by Mercy Mission, the ship contains only emergency humanitarian relief (food & medicine). Later GoSL statements confirm this and make no mention of any illegal items. Eleven (11) members of the SL Navy are left on board to provide “security”.
- Morning of 04 June 2009: Mr. Atmanathan of SAI International Assoc, the consignee of the ship’s goods is arrested and continues to be detained without charge.

Resolution & the Future:

Mercy Mission (UK) implores the Government of Sri Lanka to engage with the Mercy Mission in order to overcome any paperwork errors and ensure that the emergency humanitarian relief (food & medicine) donated by the Tamil Diaspora are delivered to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the camps.

To that end, Mercy Mission seeks the GoSL’s permission to allow the ship and her cargo to enter into Colombo Port, be cleared appropriately, and handed over the Government Agent - Vavuniya, a local NGO, or a GoSL Ministry for distribution to the IDPs.

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The GoSL has itself repeatedly pleaded with the international community for assistance with the humanitarian catastrophe that has overwhelmed them. With the sole objective of providing this desperately needed emergency humanitarian relief to the 300,000 IDPs in the camps and in the spirit of “engaging”, “reconciling” and “building bridges” with the Tamil Diaspora, Mercy Mission (UK) **appeals to the Government of Sri Lanka to please let this assistance reach those who are in such desperate need.**

Mercy Mission (UK) has attempted to be completely transparent, accountable and purely humanitarian, as can be seen on our website (www.vannimission.org). On the website we have given the GPS locations and “live mapping” of the ship’s progress and the “monitor onboard”, an ex-SLMM monitor, Mr. Kristjan Guðmundsson, has been openly reporting (blogging) on the ship’s progress.

Whatever the outcome of this process we at Mercy Mission hope, and will continue to strive for, a greater engagement with the Government of Sri Lanka and an exploration of the ways and means that the Tamil Diaspora can engage with the Government in order to help those in need.

ENDS

Please visit the website for more details, photos, and videos (including one depicting the route of the Mercy Mission).

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