



Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation

தமிழர் புனர்வாழ்வு கழகம்

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Re: World Humanitarian Day

World Humanitarian Day

On this, the inaugural "World Humanitarian Day", Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) honors the memory of humanitarian workers throughout the world who have laid down their lives in selfless service to those affected by war or natural disaster. Humanitarian workers in Sri Lanka, and TRO staff in particular, have been the frequent target of violence. Sri Lanka continues to be one of the most dangerous places in the world for humanitarian workers and with over one hundred having been killed since 2005 (Action Contre La Faim 17, TRO 7, etc).

We also wish to draw attention to those humanitarian workers who courageously continue to work in dangerous conditions risking death, injury, rape, torture and disappearance. The local staff of UN Agencies, international and national NGOs, and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in Sri Lanka deserve special mention especially those who continued to assist the 330,000 IDPs in the Vanni after the UN and international NGOs deserted the people and left the area in September 2008.

During this period, September 2008 to May 2009, thirty-six (36) humanitarian workers were killed by aerial bombardment and artillery shelling in the so called 'safe zones'. Of these, 19 were TRO staff and the other 17 were local staff of the ICRC, international and national NGOs, CBOs and volunteer medical staff in the makeshift hospitals.

Many of these deaths occurred in the final days of the military onslaught into the 'safe zone' and as a result the details are only now filtering out. The difficulty in getting accurate information has been due to the lack of access to the concentration camps in the North of Sri Lanka where most of the survivors from the 'safe zone' are imprisoned by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL).

Current Situation in the Concentration Camps

Over 280,000 Tamil civilians who survived the Sri Lanka Armed Forces military onslaught into the so called 'safe zone' are now being kept as prisoners in the concentration camps in the North of Sri Lanka. The GoSL is committing widespread violations of International Human Rights Law and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in the management of the concentration camps.

The GoSL has limited access to the camps by international humanitarian organizations and the ICRC and has prevented the Tamil Diaspora and TRO from formally participating in the humanitarian response to the crisis. This is in contrast to the response to the 2004 tsunami, during which a similar number of persons were displaced. At that time, the Tamil Diaspora, international humanitarian agencies and numerous others were



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allowed full and free access and were able to adequately serve the needs of the IDPs. In contrast to that response the GoSL in this case failed to adequately plan for the arrival of these persons though it knew that approximately 330,000 persons were in the Vanni and would need to be cared for after hostilities ceased. The GoSL restriction of access and freedom of movement have also severely hampered the humanitarian response to this crisis.

The Tamil Diaspora and TRO are ready, willing and able to assist those imprisoned in the camps if allowed to do so by the GoSL. The camps are overcrowded and badly planned with inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure and are prone to flooding - a major concern given the recent flooding and the fast approaching monsoon season. There are continuing outbreaks of contagious diseases with health officials recording thousands of cases of diarrhea, hepatitis, dysentery, and chickenpox. Additionally, there are approximately 35,000-50,000 children (estimates vary as the GoSL has yet to compile or publish registration lists) in the camps and according to a study by the Sri Lanka Medical Research Institute 46.9% of these children are underweight, 35.6% exhibit wasting (low weight for height) and 30% are stunted (low height for age).

There are also confirmed reports of arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearances, abductions, torture and other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the treatment of the detainees in the concentration camps.

Issues and recommendations:

- The concentration camps are places of mass arbitrary detention where a group of people are being imprisoned, indefinitely, without trial or any charges being filed, based solely on their ethnic identity, being Tamil, and the fact that they formerly resided in territory controlled by the LTTE.
 - ♦ This illegal mass detention is thus discrimination and is prohibited in International Human Rights Law, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR: Articles 9 & 12), and by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Principles 12 & 14)
 - ♦ These violations should cease immediately and the detainees must be allowed to have freedom of movement out of the camps to places of their choice - be it their original places of habitation or to the homes of friends and family. If they choose to stay in the camps they must be allowed to have freedom of movement into and out of the camp.
- Denial of unfettered humanitarian access by the humanitarian community and and free access by the media and family members. (Principle 25 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement)
 - ♦ Humanitarian agencies and humanitarian assistance of all types must have complete and unrestricted access to the camps so as to be able to better serve the needs of the internees.
 - ♦ The GoSL has also not allowed the media, international humanitarian organizations and family members to communicate with the internees in private so that they can freely speak their minds and convey what they have witnessed over the past 18 months.



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- Independent monitors, ideally from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are desperately needed to prevent further human rights abuses from occurring, these include: arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearances, abductions, torture and other abuses of the detainees human rights.

TRO calls on the international community and the Tamil Diaspora to pressure the GoSL to immediately allow freedom of movement to the IDP Detainees and unfettered humanitarian access to the camps.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
TRO workers killed	1	7	1	0	19	28
Other humanitarian workers killed			60		17	77
Total					36	105

TRO, in Sri Lanka and internationally, have had extensive experience with IDP camp management, resettlement and demining over the past 24 years. During the exodus from Jaffna, after the 2004 tsunami, and during the past 18 months TRO cared for hundreds of thousands of IDPs building shelters, providing food, water, sanitation, primary healthcare and development. Currently, TRO and the Tamil Diaspora, despite attempts by the GoSL to limit our engagement, are providing large amounts of funds to international and local NGOs working with those affected by the war. We urge the GoSL to de-politicize humanitarian assistance and development and utilize the vast wealth of knowledge and resources that TRO and the Tamil Diaspora are able to mobilize. If there is to be a just, sustainable peace on the island the depoliticization of humanitarian assistance, resettlement and development is an important first step.

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