



# Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Sri Lanka Govt Actions will Exacerbate the Humanitarian Crisis

#### TRO Headquarters

Kilinochchi

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It is with great concern that Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) learns of the Government of Sri Lanka's (GoSL) [order](#) to the United Nations and international Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to withdraw all expatriate and national staff and their physical assets from the Vanni<sup>1</sup>. Even more disturbing is the fact that these international organizations, other than ICRC, have made statements that they will adhere to the GoSL edict without any protest.

#### TRO Will Continue to Provide Humanitarian Relief in War Affected Areas

TRO wishes to inform the International Community that TRO and other Vanni based local NGOs (LNGOs) will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs)<sup>2</sup> currently displaced due to the GoSL's military offensive and the bombing and shelling of civilian areas. TRO has been working in the area for 23 years and will continue do so. It appears that the UN and international organizations always desert the people they assist when they are most in need.

#### Humanitarian Assistance Severely Curtailed

The withdrawal of the UN and iNGOs from the Vanni will severely impact the level of humanitarian assistance that the IDPs receive and will remove the last "impartial", international witness to the immense civilian suffering and war crimes that the GoSL's military offensive is committing. As noted in past [Situation Reports](#)<sup>3</sup> published by TRO, the humanitarian situation was already critical due to rapid and repeated displacements over the past few months, ongoing GoSL restrictions and embargoes on the transportation of humanitarian relief items to the Vanni, and the reduced access for the humanitarian community that the GoSL has had in place for the past two years. There are currently shortages of food, medicine, non-food relief items (NFRI) and temporary shelter materials. There are no stocks of food and any further displacement will have disastrous effects.

Mr. Jegas, TRO Kilinochchi District Director, stated that, "Now that the international organizations are departing there is the fear among the people that the Sri Lanka Army and Air Force will expand the targeting of civilian buildings and IDP camps to further terrorize the people." The bombing of Kilinochchi Town by the SL Air Force Wednesday morning (10 September 2008) is indicative of what is to follow once the international organizations have withdrawn.

#### Humanitarian Assistance vs. Development

The Defence Secretary, [Gotabhaya Rajapaksa](#), misses the point entirely when he states that, "... Currently nobody can do any development work in that area. So there's no reason for them to stay in Kilinochchi."<sup>4</sup> This deliberately misleading statement belies the fact that most of the iNGOs and UN Agencies in the Vanni have been focused on

<sup>1</sup> The Vanni consists of the parts of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya Districts controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

<sup>2</sup> 100,000 IDPs were displaced between 2006 & early 2008 and over 150,000 have been displaced in the past 3 months. (Source: Government Agent and local officials)

<sup>3</sup> Humanitarian Crisis in the Vanni - 1 Sept 2008

(<http://troonline.net/Humanitarian%20Crisis%20in%20the%20Vanni%20-%201%20Sept%202008.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2008/09/080908\\_gotabhaya\\_ngos.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2008/09/080908_gotabhaya_ngos.shtml)



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emergency humanitarian relief for the past two years and not development and that even with the efforts of 15 international NGOs (OXFAM, FORUT, CARE International, Save the Children in Sri Lanka, SOLIDAR, DRC, SEED, SEVALANKA, NPA, NRC, WUSC, CARITAS/HUDEC, ZOA, WorldVision, IOM), 4 UN Agencies (WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR) and the ICRC the humanitarian situation was rapidly spiralling downward with all indicators, such as malnutrition levels, steadily climbing.

Most of these international organizations have been working in the Vanni for the past twenty years providing humanitarian assistance in the education, healthcare, water and sanitation, rehabilitation and emergency relief sectors – they were not, especially since the Rajapaksa administration took office in December 2005, investing in significant developmental activities. The removal of these iNGOs will leave a large gap in the quality and quantity of the humanitarian assistance that the IDPs receive.

### **Witness to Attacks on Civilians and Humanitarian Situation**

The exclusion of the international organizations from the Vanni is just the most recent attempt by the GoSL remove the impartial third party witness to its atrocities. This process began soon after the current administration took office with the abduction and execution of the 7 TRO staff members in January 2006 by paramilitary forces allied to the GoSL and was followed in August 2006 by the execution, by GoSL forces in Muttur, of 17 members of the international NGO Action Contra Le Faim (ACF). Over the past two years a total of 60 humanitarian workers have been killed.

The GoSL has sought to limit access by international expatriate staff to the NorthEast by first instituting a strict “work permit” system in 2006 for expatriate staff and then cancelling and/or limiting the number of work visas issued to the humanitarian agencies and imposing inordinately restrictive rules and refusing to extend visas.

### **Media Access Banned**

The GoSL also prohibits media access to the Vanni and other war-affected areas so as to limit international coverage of the conflict and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. The international organizations were, after the departure of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), the last source of such information and the now GoSL has silenced them.