



யாழ் கத்தோலிக்க மறைமாவட்ட நீதி சமாதான ஆணைக்குழு Commission For Justice & Peace of The Catholic Diocese of Jaffna

T.Phone No: 0778096144

E-mail:mangalarajah@gmail.com

P.O.Box : 02

Bishop's House,
Jaffna. Sri Lanka.

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Director/Chairman

Rev.Fr.S.V.B.Mangalarajah

Patron

Rt.Rev.Dr Justin B. Gnanapragasam

Bishop of Jaffna

Secretary

Mr.A.Santhiapillai

Condemnation of the Land grabbing by the Mahaveli- Development Authority and some other related issues

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Jaffna strongly condemn all the measures taken by the Mahaveli-Development Authority to acquire the lands and resources of the livelihood (paddy-fields & other arable lands) of the Tamils living in the Mullaitivu District for several generations. (Mahaveli Development Authority was established decades ago by the Government with the aim of bringing the longest river in Sri Lanka to the North with the aim of cultivating thousands of acres of lands which hitherto had no access to water).

Tamils had been living in the villages of Kokkilai, Nayaru, Karunattukeni, Kokkuthoduvai for several generations. Fishermen from the South used to come to these areas without proper authorization and were involved in fishing and thus disturbing the local inhabitants. Now the Mahaveli Development Authority has given them land permits to remain there permanently. Thus the original inhabitants in these areas who had been living here for several generations have become landless.

- So far in this area around 2000 acres have been distributed by the Mahaveli Development Authority to 6000 families from the South. Here there not a single Tamil family from this area who is given land. In the Mullaitivu district we find on the one land the Security Forces of Sri Lanka are still in enforced occupations of the people's lands and paddy fields. On the other hand we find the Mahaveli Development Authority is acquiring lands and the paddy-fields which form main part of their livelihood. Mahaveli river water has so far never reached the Vavuniya district! The Mahaveli river water which reaches Anuradhapura District is barely enough to satisfy the needs of the farmers in that district. In this context we cannot expect even a drop of water of the Mahaveli River to the Mullaitivu district. In the name of Mahaveli development only the settlement of people from the South is taking place. Hence we strongly suspect this scheme is part of the massive plan of the Government to transform the demographic pattern in this area and in a few years time there will be a sizable percentage of

“நீதியால் விளைவன என்றுமுள அமைதியும் நம்பிக்கையும்.”எசா. 32:17

“Justice will bring about peace.” Is 32:17

Sinhalese families in the midst of Tamils, is in no way going to help to reduce tension and bring about reconciliation among the major ethnic groups.

According to Banda-Chelva pact in 1957 and again according to Dudley-Chelva pact in 1965 in settlement programmes like Mahaveli schemes, the beneficiaries should be from the district or the province. If there are not enough beneficiaries from the province also the landless people from the same ethnic groups from other places should be chosen. But unfortunately these pacts were disregarded unilaterally by the Government and hence paving the way for ethnic tension. Later on when late Mr. Gamini Dissanayake was the Minister of Mahaveli Development, an agreement was agreed upon not to disturb the ethnic percentage of the region while choosing the beneficiaries. At the moment all these precautions are disregarded and this will in no way help to dilute the tension between the ethnic groups.

- There are also efforts to hide or destroy traces of ancient settlements and places of religious importance in these areas as also in other places. One example from here is in the Tamil village in this area, Chemmalai. There is in this village an ancient Hindu Temple - Neeravipillayar Temple. Now there have been efforts to prove that here there are traces of some Buddhist symbols and the Archaeological Department has given permission for the erection of a huge Buddhist Vihara here. There are also efforts to show that this Buddhist site is more than 2500 years old and plans are being worked out to transform traditional Tamil homelands into Sinhala settlements. There are in the Jaffna University, archaeological experts such as Prof. Dr. Pushparatnam and others who have done elaborate archaeological excavations and researches in many parts of Sri Lanka and published number of research articles and books. If such experts are consulted, such efforts to cover up or ever destroy the true archaeological findings will not take place.
- Recent findings with the help of the satellite pictures, rainfall-patterns and fluctuating temperatures of the countries in the world have come to some conclusions which are very disturbing. According to these findings with regard to the global weather change due to irresponsible human actions (such as destruction of jungles etc.), Sri Lanka which was in the 97th position has now advanced to the 4th place. Destruction of jungles during the past 10 years has accelerated in an unprecedented manner! Two major reasons can be attributed to this. One is that massive extension of the camps of the Security Forces in the North and East, felling down of trees in thousands of acres of North and East. It is to be recalled that for some period immediately after the 'war', lorry-loads of timber from these areas were transported to the South and the Forest Authority Officials were powerless to stop these. Another reason is the clearing of jungles covering thousands of acres in view of Mahaveli Authorities' settlement programme. The fluctuating weather conditions such as unseasonal rains and floods, droughts etc. which are now common in Sri Lanka indicate this change. All Sri Lankans starting from the rulers to the ordinary people should pay serious attention to prevent the disaster which is already in course.

The people in the Mullaitivu district are harassed from different fronts - On the one side the Security-Forces are still in control of these people's habitable lands as well as farmlands. Then we find the Mahaveli Development Authorities are acquiring their lands and reallocating these to somebody else and rendering these original inhabitants landless. We also find the Archaeological Department acquiring their traditional temples and sites of worship and denying them their right of worship in places which were held by them for several generations.

All these actions which are accelerated in recent times are not in any way going to help for good governance, national reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

S. V. B. Mangalarajah

Rev. Fr. S.V.B. Mangalarajah
Director

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FR. S. V. B. MANGALARAJAH
Director/Chairman
Commission for Justice & Peace
of the Catholic Diocese of Jaffna
Sri Lanka