

Eliminate All Circumstances Aiding Resumption of War

**NORTH EAST SECRETARIAT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

**NESOHR**



**A9 Road**

**Karadippokku, Kilinochchi**

**nesohr@hotmail.com**

**Tel: 94 (0) 21 228 5986**

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**Press Release**

The sudden appearance of a Buddhist statue in Trincomalee is provocative for many reasons. It appeared suddenly in a public place with no prior public discussion. It appeared in an area which has a majority of non-Buddhist people. It appeared in the administrative centre of the NorthEast that is the Tamil homeland. In Sri Lanka Buddhism has come to symbolise the hegemony of the Buddhist majority over other religions. For all of these reasons Tamils protested non-violently against this new statue.

The ensuing violence against Tamils has heightened the concern of the Tamil people for their safety. Their concern has turned into fear from seeing the security forces protecting the statue, disregarding the court ruling for the temporary removal of the statue until permission is obtained from the Trincomalee Urban Council. The situation has the potential to spark off nation-wide violence. Several days after the unrest security forces have so far failed to calm the tense situation. The episode is a clear violation of the ceasefire agreement (CFA) in which the signatories agreed to bring normalcy to people's lives. NESOHR is deeply concerned that the build up of events in Sri Lanka may be moving the country towards resumption of war. During the three years of ceasefire agreement (CFA), there has been a continuous string of indicators of a lead-up to war. There is the failure of the Government of Sri Lanka to channel funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction to the NorthEast as decided in the initial peace talks. There was the dissolution of parliament following the Interim Self-Governing Agreement (ISGA) proposal submitted by the LTTE to speed the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the NorthEast. There has been the failure of the new coalition government to move the peace process forward. There is the support received by the renegade LTTE commander Karuna from government forces. There are the continuing murders of Tamils in the east, including Mr A Chandraneheru, a NESOHR member. The tsunami devastation provided further proof of this insincerity in the peace initiative. The failure to set up a joint structure to carry out the tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction work must certainly be a huge blow to those who hoped for peace following the tsunami.

The enormity of the human rights violations committed during the two decades of war has not yet been fully acknowledged and the victims and their relatives have received almost no justice.

NESOHR, during its one year of existence, has come face to face with the pain of the people whose human rights have been flagrantly violated. NESOHR through its existence and actions has imparted some hope to these people. Where is the hope for these people when faced with another war?

Sri Lanka was facing an economic crisis prior to the tsunami disaster. The international community, as part of its tsunami aid, has wiped away all loans to Sri Lanka and thus averted the economic crisis. Encouraged by this, Sri Lanka has embarked on a military build up at a time when its people have just faced an unprecedented natural disaster. Any further assistance given to Sri Lanka for tsunami rebuilding could become military assistance in disguise.

The time for waiting and hoping for the peace process to succeed is past. The indicators clearly show that Sri Lanka is moving towards war. If determined actions are not taken now to stop this, it may be too late. We urge immediate steps, nationally and internationally, to eliminate all circumstances that encourage resumption of war.

The international human rights community must act with vision to stop resumption of war and push for the recognition of the basic rights of Tamils in order to promote human rights throughout Sri Lanka.

NESOHR appeals to the donor community to restrict and strictly monitor the flow of funds to Sri Lanka and also appeals to the countries selling weapons to place an embargo on the sale of military equipment to Sri Lanka.

Fr M X Karunaratnam, Chairperson