

Genocide in Sri Lanka

As Sri Lankan government forces push towards a brutal military end to the 25-year old civil war, over 300,000 Tamil Internally Displaced Persons are suffering and the conflict reaches genocidal proportions. Concurrently, media freedom and dissent are suppressed, providing impunity for the military's war crimes.

Under Attack in the Conflict Zone

"We talk about approximately a quarter of a million persons who are fundamentally trapped in a very small restricted perimeter – 250 sq km [96 sq m] - which is the theatre of very intense combat....They find themselves simply under fire and highly vulnerable. Access to medical care is almost non-existent at this point. They are in need of food, they are in need of shelter and most of all they are in need of security."

– Jacques de Maio, ICRC's head of operations for South Asia (1/28/09)

"Around 300,000 people, that is two-thirds of the civilian population, have been forced out of their homes and are living in camps in areas controlled by the LTTE. They are trapped in (an area) not more than 50 sq km, the size of Gaza."

– Peter Balleis, the international director of the Jesuit Refugee Service (1/26/09)

"Civilians injured in the fighting cannot be transported outside the Wannai for urgent treatment due to road closures by the security forces."

– Amnesty International (1/15/09)

"There's so many people, so many guns and such a high intensity of fightingThere have been many civilians killed over the last two days. ... It's really a crisis now."

– U.N. resident coordinator Neil Buhne (1/26/09)

"There have been at least 11 Sri Lankan aerial attacks on or near hospitals inside the rebel-held areas between Dec. 15 and Jan. 15, according to a United Nations official who declined to be identified because he was not authorized to speak with the media."

– International Herald Tribune (1/23/09)

Under Attack in "Safe Zones"

"The United Nations said dozens of its workers and their relatives came under artillery fire they believed was from government troops as they sought refuge inside the government declared "safe zone" for ethnic Tamil civilians over the weekend."

– AP (1/28/09)

"People are being caught in the crossfire, hospitals and ambulances have been hit by shelling and several aid workers have been injured while evacuating the wounded. The violence is preventing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from operating in the region."

– Jacques de Maio, ICRC head of operations for South Asia (1/27/09)

"The Sri Lankan military shelled a village and a makeshift hospital inside a government-declared 'safe zone' for civilians in the north Thursday, killing at least 30 people and wounding scores, local health officials said."

– AP (1/22/09)

Mounting Civilian Casualties:

“The ICRC based its figure of hundreds dead on body counts by its staff in local hospitals. Access for aid workers was so limited, it said, that the ICRC's own presence in the region was virtually meaningless. The ICRC wanted to evacuate 200 critically wounded people on Tuesday but did not receive security clearance. Those patients, it says, now face death.”

– BBC (1/28/09)

“Heavy fighting and continuous multi-barrel artillery shelling has resulted in more than 300 internally displaced persons being killed and over 1000 hundred injured in Suthanthirapuram, Udaiyaarkaddu, and Vallipuram in the Mullaitivu District.”

– Urgent Appeal by Regional Director of Health Services (RDHS), Mullaitivu, (1/26/09)

“Medical staff in Sri Lanka say at least 18 civilians have been killed as the military continues its offensive on the northern bases of Tamil Tiger rebels. Hospital officials said the number killed in fighting around Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu could be much higher.”

– BBC (1/18/09)

“Repeated displacements, often involving the loss of their personal belongings, have taken a toll.”

– Paul Castella, the ICRC's head of delegation (1/16/09)

Media Suppression: ‘Hunting Season for Attacks on Media’

“The government's steady push into rebel lands has been accompanied by a dogged intolerance of critical reporting over the past two and a half years. Officials, including the defense secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a naturalized United States citizen, have accused journalists who write critically about military spending or strategy of being 'traitors.' Several have fled the country.”

– International Herald Tribune (1/23/09)

“In all the cases of attacks against media and assassinations of reporters there are few serious investigations by the authorities and none of the killers are ever brought to trial,’ said the International Mission. ‘A hostile environment of intolerance propelled forward by the top political leadership has created a culture of impunity and indifference making every day hunting season for attacks on media staff.”

– Reporters Without Borders (1/21/09)

“Tissainayagam's arrest was politically motivated and his detention has involved a litany of due process violations. The prosecution of journalists only reinforces the impression that the government has embarked on a systematic campaign to smother free media.”

– Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch (1/22/09)