

Jaffna Diocese - Justice & Peace Commission appeals for humanitarian aid for the displaced



In a letter addressed to the The Director, International Committee of the Red Cross by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Jaffna, has appealed for humanitarian aid for the displaced people in Wanni and Kilinochchi areas. The letter by the Director of Justice and Peace Commission, Rev. Fr. James Pathinathan explains the diplorable situation of the displaced people in the areas due to the ongoing war.

Full text of the letter :

JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION - WANNI ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF JAFFNA

St. Theresa's Church, Kilinochchi.

Date: 26 August, 2008

The Director
International Committee of the Red Cross
Iranaimadu Junction
Kilinochchi

Honourable Sir,

PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF WANNI

Wanni has been the eye of the war storm for the past two years.

Deaths, injuries, displacements and attendant misery pervade the lives of the innocent Tamil Civilians. The Draconian economic embargo imposed slyly on Wanni has become a monstrous obstacle even in giving relief and solace to the 170,000 persons recently displaced. Day and night, Wanni is thundering with Artillery Guns, Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers, Supersonic fighter jets and Naval gun boats.

A great human tragedy is exploding in Wanni which is calculatedly concealed from the world outside.

The Sri Lankan Government and its Security Forces with scant regard to, leave alone the Geneva Ethical Codes on the Conduct of War, humanitarian concern for their fellow citizens, wage an aggressive and ruthless war in Wanni. The sanctity of the civilian settlements, hospitals, schools and places of worship and are blatantly violated with impunity.

The Sri Lankan security forces heavily bombard villages after villages forcing the people to flee from their traditional homeland. Not once, but again and again displacements continue. Even before the displaced people begin to settle down in one place they are shelled to flee again. This inhuman exodus goes on and on. People are languishing under trees and on the waysides, under the scorching sun and dusty winds, and in pouring rain and thundering blasts of artillery and mortar shells. Only a few of the displaced take shelter in schools, places of worship, with friends and relatives. All these innocent people continue to live amidst severe deprivations.

The assistance that reach the people from GO's, NGO's, INGO's and the people of goodwill, even though praiseworthy, are not adequate to cater to the basic human needs of theirs. Even though the Government claims to allow all the necessary amenities, essentials such as Tarpaulin sheets, water containers, fuel, medical supplies and food are drastically slashed at the entry-exit points in reality. There are severe restrictions imposed on the movement of the INGO's thus hampering their humanitarian services to the helpless displaced people.

Besides the old and the sick, pregnant women and lactating mothers and children are the most affected ones. School children are subjected to untold hardship and bitter and traumatic experiences. The General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) examinations is being held in the country now and imagine the plight of these children who are sitting this exam under these tragic conditions. If the situation is such with the grown ups, imagine the plight of Grade 5 children who sat for the scholarship exam on the 17th August, 2008. Epidemics are

threatening the people in the absence of sufficient medical facilities. Drinking water has become a scarce commodity.

These innocent people continue to live amidst dire distress.

These fundamental human rights violations strike all over Wanni, and the truth of which doesn't reach the world at large. There are numerous obstacles calculatedly laid across the path of truth so that the dissemination of it is effectively arrested. Instead, diabolic lies are spread with ease. Prevention of the media personnel from entering Wanni and reporting impartially on the horrendous situation of the innocent Tamil people is the most cruel and cunning mode of the repressive violence perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Government.

The call of the hour is urgent.

Protect the people of Wanni who are threatened with death and destruction and dehumanization.

This is an ardent appeal from the Justice and Peace Commission - Wanni to the people of goodwill all over the world.

Rev. Fr. James Pathinathan,
The President,
Justice and Peace Commission,
The Diocese of Jaffna.

At the meantime Defence Ministry website on 28th August 2008 clarifies the situation saying, " The Humanitarian mission to free the Northern Province is proceeding according to the strategies devised by the military stated the Defence Secretary Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa during the media briefing held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Conference Hall today (28). The Defence Secretary stated that the key issue raised during the conference held with the diplomats was the Internally Displaced Persons. According to Government statistics around 31713 families are displaced in Kilinochchi alone. These families have fled from combat areas in Mulatheive."

" He clarified that the Security Forces continue to consolidate their positions in the North. There are no shortages of food and other essential commodities for those displaced in those area. Government sources have clarified that the mechanism which controls the supply of food and medicine to those areas are functioning perfectly."

" Defence Secretary however stated that he hoped all those who have been displaced in the conflict would be able to report to Vavuniya

soon as all facilities for them will be provided there. A campaign will be launched to alert the civilians in uncleared area to report to Vavuniya. Immediate relocation of the IDP's will be commenced afterwards."

Bishop Rayappu Joseph and Vicar General Meets the Wann Security Forces Commander, Major General Jagath Jayasuriya



[Photo - from the Defence Ministry website]

A special meeting, held between Mannar Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph and Wann Security Forces Commander, Major General Jagath Jayasuriya at Wann Headquarters on Thursday 28th August 2008, centered around on important issues, related to repairs and renovation work of Catholic churches in the Mannar diocese, Government's Development programme, Provision of Relief to displaced civilians, Un-interrupted conduct of prayer services in Madu Shrine, Overall security arrangements for Madhu devotees and other civilians in the Mannar District, etc.

His Lordship Bishop Rayappu Joseph and the Vicar General Very Rev. Victor Soosai, discussed with the Major General Jayasuriya about the opening of the Madhu road for pilgrims, government officials to attend to the basic work at Madhu shrine area and return of the people from Kilinochchi area to their parishes in Mannar Diocese.

Defence Ministry website reports that the Major General Jayasuriya,

presenting the government's massive infrastructure programme in the pipeline, designed for the speedy development of the entire region, told Bishop Rayappu Joseph that Security Forces in coordination with civil authorities would extend their fullest support for Mannar's return to normalcy while ensuring security for everybody with the help of his troops and the Police.

Wanni Commander, during the discussion highlighted the importance of restoration of normalcy and civil life in the Mannar District at the earliest with the speedy re-opening of civil administrative agencies in the region and Police stations.

Defence Ministry website also reports that the Major General Jayasuriya had assured the repairs and renovation work that would be effected to all places of worship under the government's proposed development programme. He also pledged all assistance to pilgrims, expecting to visit Madu in the near future once all security concerns are cleared and normalcy restored after clearing minefields.