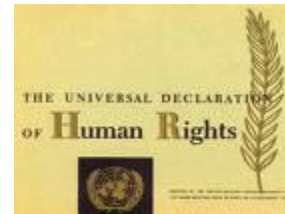


Two News Reports on Situation in Wanni

(1). 'LTTE abuses civilians in Wanni'



Human Rights Watch report – 15th Dec. 2008

Forced recruitment, restrictions on movement put lives at risk - HRW

LTTE is subjecting Tamils in the Wanni to forced recruitment, abusive forced labor, and restrictions on movement that place their lives at risk, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today (Dec 15).

The 17-page report, "Trapped and Mistreated: LTTE Abuses against Civilians in the Wanni," details how the LTTE is brutally abusing the Tamil population in areas under their control.

"The LTTE claims to be fighting for the Tamil people, but it is responsible for much of the suffering of civilians in the Wanni," said Brad Adams, Asia director for Human Rights Watch. "As the LTTE loses ground to advancing government forces, their treatment of the very people they say they are fighting for is getting worse."

In the face of an ongoing government military offensive, the LTTE has increased the pressure on the civilian population under its control. Having long used a coercive pass system to prevent civilians from leaving areas it controls, the LTTE has now completely prohibited movement out of the Wanni, except for some medical emergencies. By refusing to allow displaced persons to leave for government-held territory, the group has severely restricted their access to essential humanitarian relief. Only about a thousand people have managed to flee the conflict zone since March 2008.

"By refusing to allow people their basic rights to freedom of movement, the LTTE has trapped hundreds of thousands of civilians in a dangerous war zone," said Adams.

"Trapped in the LTTE's iron fist, ordinary Tamils are forcibly recruited as fighters and forced to engage in dangerous labor near the front lines," said Adams.

While increased international pressure and other factors had led to a decrease in its recruitment of children, recent reports indicate that the group has stepped up child recruitment in the Wanni. LTTE cadres have urged 14- to 18-year-olds at schools to join. The group often sends 17-year-olds for military training, apparently calculating

that by the time such cases are reported to protection agencies, the youths will have turned 18 and no longer be considered child soldiers.

In "Trapped and Mistreated," Human Rights Watch calls upon the LTTE to:

- * Stop preventing civilians from leaving areas under its control; respect the right to freedom of movement of civilians, including the right of civilians to move to government-controlled territory for safety;
- * Stop all forced recruitment into the LTTE; end all abductions and coercion;
- * End all recruitment of children under the age of 18; cease the use of children in military operations; release all child combatants currently in its ranks, as well as all persons who were recruited when children but are now over the age of 18;
- * Stop all abusive or unpaid forced labor, including labor it characterizes as "voluntary"; cease demanding that all families provide labor to the LTTE; stop forcing civilians to engage in labor directly related to the conduct of military operations, such as constructing trenches and bunkers;
- * Provide humanitarian agencies and UN agencies safe and unhindered access to areas under the LTTE's control, and guarantee the security of all humanitarian and UN workers, including Wanni residents working as humanitarian or UN staff.

Summary of the Report

Last year they were taking the people born in 1990; now [they are taking] those born in 1991. They look at the family identity cards and take the young ones. If people of military age go into hiding, they will take younger children or the father, until they get the boys or girls they want. The LTTE no longer gives people passes to go [out of the Wanni. At the moment, only medical cases or the elderly will get an LTTE pass. Before this time, you could hand over all your assets to the LTTE and you were free to go. But now they stop everyone, saying, "We are fighting for the people, but the people have to stay with us."

Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Tamil civilians are currently trapped in intensified fighting between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the LTTE's northern stronghold, known as the Wanni. As the LTTE has lost ground to advancing government forces, civilians have been squeezed into a shrinking conflict zone. The encroaching fighting has placed their lives increasingly in danger. Many spend their day under the constant sound of nearby small-arms fire, shelling, and bombing. Because of a near total government ban on access by humanitarian agencies and the media, the suffering of the civilian population of the Wanni receives scant attention outside Sri Lanka.

This report addresses abuses committed by the LTTE against civilians during the current fighting in the Wanni. Given the sharp limitations on access to the Wanni imposed by the LTTE and the government, we do not suggest that this is a full picture of the situation there. Yet Human Rights Watch research in Sri Lanka shows that the LTTE has

brutally and systematically abused the Tamil population on whose behalf they claim to fight, and that the LTTE bears a heavy responsibility for the desperate plight of the civilians in the Wanni. The LTTE, which has been fighting for an independent Tamil state-Tamil Eelam-has a deplorable human rights record. During the past 25 years it has committed innumerable murders of Sinhalese, Muslim, and Tamil civilians, political assassinations in Sri Lanka and abroad, and suicide bombings with high loss of life. The LTTE has frequently targeted civilians with bombs and remote-controlled landmines, killed perceived political opponents including many Tamil politicians, journalists, and members of rival organizations, and has forcibly recruited Tamils into its forces, many of them children. In the areas under its control, the LTTE has ruled through fear, denying basic freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and movement.

During the current fighting, abuses have again mounted. In research conducted by Human Rights Watch in Sri Lanka from October through December 2008-including 35 interviews with eyewitnesses and humanitarian aid workers working in the north-we found extensive evidence of ongoing LTTE forced recruitment of civilians, widespread use of abusive forced labor, and improper and unjustified restrictions on civilians' freedom of movement.

The LTTE continues to systematically compel young men and women, including children, to join their forces, and have dramatically increased their forced recruitment practices. The LTTE has recently gone beyond its long-standing "one person per family" forced recruitment policy in LTTE-controlled territory and now sometimes requires two or more family members to join the ranks, depending on the size of the family. Notably, after a significant decrease in reported LTTE use of child soldiers in recent years, recruitment of children under 18 may be on the increase since September 2008, particularly of 17-year-olds. LTTE militants still use schools and displaced person camps to encourage children to join their ranks.

The LTTE continues to force civilians to engage in dangerous forced labor, including the digging of trenches for its fighters and the construction of military bunkers on the frontlines. It also uses forced labor as punishment, often forcing family members of civilians who flee to perform dangerous labor near the frontlines.

By shutting down its pass system for travel, the LTTE has banned nearly all civilians from leaving areas under LTTE control (with the exception of urgent medical cases), effectively trapping several hundred thousand civilians in an increasingly hazardous conflict zone, with extremely limited humanitarian relief. The trapped civilians provide a ready pool of civilians for future forced labor and recruitment of fighters. In doing so, the LTTE is unlawfully seeking to use the presence of the large civilian population in areas under its control for military advantage.

Human Rights Watch calls on the LTTE to stop its widespread abuses against the Tamil civilian population under its control, and to respect their human rights. In particular, Human Rights Watch urges the LTTE to stop preventing civilians from leaving areas under its control, to stop forced recruitment, as well as any recruitment of children, and to bring an end to abusive forced labor. More detailed recommendations are contained at the end of this report.

The government-ordered withdrawal of the United Nations (UN) and virtually all international humanitarian agencies from the Wanni in September 2008 has drastically worsened the plight of the civilian population. The forced withdrawal has also made it more difficult to protect the rights of the Wanni population: with a greatly restricted presence on the ground, protection agencies like UNICEF have lost the ability to monitor and act on abuses committed by all parties to the conflict in the Wanni. The government's policy of detaining those who flee from the Wanni has made many civilians fearful to seek safety in government-held areas. The massive flooding caused when Cyclone Nisha struck Sri Lanka on November 25 caused 60,000-70,000 persons to lose their homes and shelters. Although the Sri Lankan government denies it, state relief efforts have been inadequate and restrictive government policies on UN and other assistance have exacerbated humanitarian suffering in the Wanni.



(2). **TAMIL GUARDIAN** Wednesday August 27 2008

NEWS

AMID pouring rain and thundering blasts of artillery and mortar shells, more than 170,000 Internally Displaced Persons in Vanni are facing a great human tragedy, which is calculatedly concealed from the world outside, said Rev. Fr. James Pathinathan, the president of the Vanni branch of the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jaffna, in an urgent appeal to the U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, on Tuesday.



"If the International Community doesn't act at once, it will be too late," he told TamilNet after handing over the memorandum to the Residential Representative of the UNHCR in Vanni. "If the International Community fails to take such a bold step, it would lead the Tamils to think that the IC is supporting the military agenda of the GoSL, at the cost of the lives of the innocent IDPs in Vanni," he told TamilNet. A ceasefire will greatly help NGOs taking food and other essentials to the IDPs who face the risk of annihilation, he said.



Catholic priests including Fr. James Pathinathan and Wanni civilians taking part in the protest march.

"The International Community and other interested nations, if they want to usher in peace with justice in Sri Lanka, they must first effect an immediate cease fire and address urgent humanitarian needs of the innocent civilians here," he added. In his appeal to U.N. Secretary General, Fr. Pathinathan noted that epidemics were threatening the people in the absence of sufficient medical facilities. "Drinking water has become a scarce commodity." The JPC staged a protest march against the Sri Lanka government's war on Vanni civilians, joined by hundreds of people including religious heads that began from Ki'linochchi St. Theresa's Church at 10:15 a.m.

