

CATHOLIC NEWS UPDATE ASIA

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SRI LANKA : Rajapaksa promises 58 thousand Tamil refugees will go home within 15 days by Melani Manel Perera *The government in Colombo to ensure the resettlement of a quarter of the refugees to a parliamentary delegation from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The Tamil-language newspapers say that the group of politicians criticized the actions of the government. State media report the delegation was satisfied with the refugee situation.* Colombo (AsiaNews) The Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, has guaranteed that within the next 15 days 58 thousand Tamil refugees will leave the camps to return to their homes. The head of state promised the resettlement of little more than a quarter of 253 thousand Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to a delegation of 10 parliamentarians from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, who arrived on the island for a series of meetings on October 13 month.

The closed lipped Indian delegation, made no declarations to local press after a number of meetings with the President, Prime Minister and leader of the opposition, nor after the visit to eight refugee camps in Menik Farm. Once back home the 10 MPs of Tamil Nadu delivered a report on the visit to M. Karunanidhi, Chief Minister of the State. The contents of the document were leaked and released first by Indian newspapers and then those of Sri Lanka.

According Virakesari and Thinakural, the two main Tamil language newspapers on the island, the members of the Indian delegation "did not feel satisfied with the current conditions of refugee camps." The report delivered into the hands of the chief minister of Tamil Nadu complains about the poor conditions in which IDPs' are forced to live, the lack of water, milk powder for children, toilets and bathrooms". The indiscretions reported by Sri Lankan newspapers also speak of "barbed wire to separate the individual camps from each other" and "children and the elderly who are still sick and threatened with death".

While several press agencies highlight the delegation's complaints to the Colombo government for having "too little for the IDPs", authorities and state media say that the Indian MPs expressed their satisfaction with the situation of refugees .

Even in India the visit of the delegation of Tamil Nadu raises debate and controversy. The chief minister of state said that "the problem of the Tamils of Sri Lanka is a national problem and not just of one party or alliance." For M. Karunanidhi it is surprising that parties like AIADMK, BJP and the leftist coalition "ignore" and "avoid" the issue and he is urging New Delhi to keep check that the Colombo government meet the promises made to the delegation from Tamil Nadu. - www.asianews.it