

CATHOLIC NEWS UPDATE ASIA

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SRI LANKA : Sri Lanka should deal with its past to heal its wounds, Anglican bishop says by Melani Manel Perera *At the annual session of the Diocese of Colombo of the Anglican Church, Rev Duleep de Chickera calls for justice and freedom for Tamil refugees. A year will be devoted to 'National Reconciliation and Healing' in 2009-2010. The country's various religious communities play a fundamental role for the country. Inter-Christian collaboration is particularly important.* Colombo (AsiaNews) In his address to the annual session of the Diocese of Colombo of the (Anglican) Church of Ceylon, which opened last Friday, the Rev Duleep de Chickera, Anglican bishop of Colombo , urged his audience to work for national reconciliation and not forget the 200,000 Tamil refugees still living in camps. In his speech, he insisted, "we [. . .] must deal with the mistakes of the past" and work with other religions and Christian Churches to "heal" the wounds that afflict Sri Lankan society.

As he did before, Bishop de Chickera is calling for help, freedom and equality for Tamil refugees. For months now he has insisted on the need for justice for the thousands of people who have been living month after month in refugee camps, in very tragic circumstances.

The meeting between clergy and the faithful from the Diocese of Colombo also gave the prelate an opportunity to mention 125 Anglican families stuck in camps in Vanni. "We must never forget that those who crossed over are Sri Lankans; and that they crossed over at the invitation of their government to be liberated," he said. Still, the controversy over conditions in refugee camps and the slow pace of resettlement back home continues.

For the prelate, once they are freed, refugees should "receive equal opportunities for education, development and growth." For them, liberation will require that "they should not be hindered or harmed by any ideology or force that might want to exploit or suppress them all over again."

For Rev de Chickera, the "military defeat of the LTTE cannot be expected to resolve our national crisis." On the contrary, Sri Lanka needs to heal from the deep wounds that have marked its history since independence. Since then, "unimaginable violence has devalued human life and dignity. Layer upon layer of intimidation and discrimination have created deep social suspicion and antagonism," he lamented. For the Anglican Church, 2009 and 2010 must be devoted to 'National Reconciliation and Healing'.

In light of the urgency for the nation's moral and civil renaissance, the bishop wants the Anglican Church to boost relations with other religions because "they have a role to play in this work." Indeed, working with other Christian denominations is so important that he emphasised the need for close cooperation with them.

Invited to the meeting as a special guest, Mgr Thomas Savundaranayagam, Catholic bishop of Jaffna, was in the audience listening to him. For de Chickera, the faithful and the clergy must promote in their communities a society that allows Sri Lankans to come to terms with the "mistakes of the past" and nurture "behaviours that respect and are inclusive of others." - www.asianews.it