Civilians Encircled by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces

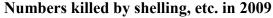
in the Vanni, Northern Sri Lanka

Numbers of civilians

- 330,000 people, 81,000 families Government Agent of Mullaitivu 3/5/09
- 200,000 to 300,00 UN Special Rapporteur for IDPs 12/23/08
- 150,000 to 190,000, UN OHCA John Holmes 3/26/09
- 50-60,000 *SL Defense spokesman 3/24/09*

Conditions of life

- "One of the most disastrous situations" *ICRC*South Asia head 3/4/09
- Deaths associated with lack of food, shortage of medicine have become a reality – UN 3/4/09
- Sri Lankan Army (SLA) 'indiscriminately shelling' no-fire zone – HRW 3/23/09
- No shelling into safe zone, no shortage of food & medicine *SL Defense spokesman 3/24/09*
- "We are very concerned that the government of Sri Lanka continues its shelling of areas where there are large numbers of civilians" *Rosemary DiCarlo, US mission to the UN 3/26/09*



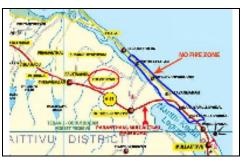
- 2,683 civilians Jan 20 to Mar 7, considered 'gross underestimate' of actual figure *UN OCHA 3/09*
- 3,546 civilians Jan 1 to Mar 23, actual figures may be 'far worse' *WWW* 3/23/09
- 148 civilian casualties daily from Jan 1 to Mar 23 [ibid]

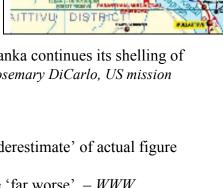
Humanitarian access

- Limited access by sea only due to SL military blockade
- ICRC sole INGO with limited access
- TRO main indigenous NGO based with civilians
- UN, INGOs & NGOs ordered to leave Vanni Sept 2008. All complied without complaint.
- Most relocated to Vavuniya according to government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) plan to control civilians in internment camps

Characteristics of civilian population

- Tamil inhabitants of Vanni
- Tamil civil administration
- Tamil family of current & deceased soldiers
- Hill Country Tamils settled in Vanni in 1970s
- Have lived in Tiger-controlled area for 25 years & have major concerns about their safety in moving to SL army-controlled territory







Puthumathalan Vanni Feb 26, 2009

Freedom of movement

- 50,000 have fled across frontlines to army internment camps in 2009
- Due to concerns for their safety living under SLA, when Vanni inhabitants are shelled out of homes, they have continued to stay under protection of Tigers.

Now these people concentrated in a very small area.

- Tigers taking heavy casualties protecting civilians from army
- Fears that if army takes civilians, many will be killed immediately
- Most INGOs & governments accuse Tamil fighters of holding civilians against their will & using them as human shields
- Some local INGO employees prevented from leaving a humanitarian catastrophe on orders from government



Bunkers to protect from SLA shelling

Endangered children

- "Hundreds of children have been killed and many more injured as a result of the conflict in Sri Lanka," Veneman said. "Thousands are now at risk because of a critical lack of food, water and medicines." UNICEF 3/18/09
- "Sixty-five thousand school going children are being affected by this prolonged war as 288 schools failed to reopen in the Vanni from the beginning of the current year. Dr. J. Sivamanoharan, Maththalan Hospital, 3/27/09

How to help civilians

- Most INGOs, the UN & missions in SL work within framework of 'war on terror'
- Active participants in GoSL plan to 'separate' civilians from their protectors
- Evacuation to SLA-controlled internment camps main goal
- Little understanding that civilians have welljustified fear that, if they end up in SLA hands, the result will be worse than death by shelling

Shelling victims March 2009

Issues to be addressed

- SLA shelling into no-fire zone
- Humanitarian corridors/ humanitarian access
- Wishes of the civilian population
- Screening of civilians & combatants entering SLA territory
- Internment camps: quality, access for aid workers & journalists, freedom of movement & length of stay
- Speed of re-settlement
- Likely creation of large military zones to control Tamil civilian spaces
- Possible colonization of Sinhalese by state-sponsored & army-protected Sinhalese
- Autonomy or other political settlement for Tamil homeland