

let my people go

S.J.Emmanuel



LET MY PEOPLE GO

*The Tamil Struggle
for Survival and Self-determination
in Sri Lanka*

S. J. EMMANUEL

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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
OF
THE LATE REV. DR. D. J. AMBALAVANAR
M.A.(Cantab); Ph.D.(Serampore)

HE GAVE VALIANT
WITNESS TO TRUTH AND JUSTICE
IN THE FOOTSTEPS
OF HIS MASTER

*A humble dedication
in gratitude for the friendship, inspiration
and encouragement he gave me
in my efforts
to give my voice on behalf of the voiceless
unjustly suffering death, destruction and displacements.*

***"Our task is at least to be the stump which can
become the holy seed"(Is. 6)
from his letter to me just two weeks before his death***

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FORWARD



The Tamils of Sri Lanka are suffering and dying in a war that is going on for many years behind the closed doors of a media blockade. The speeches and interviews which Father Emmanuel has delivered at the international fora bringing to light the tragic events of the war zone and the cry of his people for truth, justice and peace amount to 'a unique voice on behalf of the voiceless masses' caught suf-

fering and dying behind a media-blockade. His witness is valuable especially to those who can give life and still redeem the surviving. Hence the Tamil Chaplaincy of Germany has great pleasure in bringing them out in the form of a book.

In reading his contributions to the Tamil Cause for freedom, truth, justice and peace, one can identify easily **three perspectives**, namely, an assessment of the spiral of violence and war, the Tamil Struggle in the light of Christian teaching and the invincible force of Truth that liberates all.

1. The author contends that the Tamils having tried all the ways of democracy - parliamentary protests, non-violent satyagrahas, campaigns of non-co-operation, gentlemen-agreements etc. for over three decades and having suffered enormous death, destruction and displacements, were forced to take up arms in defence of their land and people. Hence it is unjust and hypocriti-

cal merely to condemn the resultant violence and war, without going into the root cause of such violence and trying to remedy the injustices which causes them.

Archbishop Helder Camera, in his address to the British Parliamentarians on 26 June 1972, has unfolded the spiral of violence and war in its various stages. He spoke of the political and economic injustices as the primary violence (or the white violence) and the reaction of those oppressed under such injustices as the secondary violence (or the violence of the non-violent). The latter calls for a third violence which, often institutionally, suppresses the non-violent agitation of the oppressed. This violence by the state (state-terrorism), which goes on under the cover of state-security, suppresses the very human rights of the oppressed and makes the oppressed all the more violent, leading to a massive revolution (fourth violence). What we witness today in Sri Lanka seems to be this fourth violence. The Tamils have suffered injustices and military oppression in response to their non-violent protests. And the Tamils having recourse to an armed-struggle as logical response to the prolonged state-terrorism, has spiralled into the present war. This, Father Emmanuel maintains, has to be squarely and sincerely acknowledged by those in power and the initial move to get out of this spiral of violence and war has to be taken especially by the Governments which gave birth to it.

2. The pattern of sufferings inflicted on the Tamil people by the atrocities of the State Forces, namely, the deaths, starvation, hunger, displacement, seeking refuge in the bunkers and jungles - all these, bring to mind the biblical events of the great Exodus. Just as the power of the Pharos of Egypt did not have victory over the Israelites seeking freedom through their wandering and suffering in the desert, so too the Tamils will achieve their freedom. On the basis of this biblical perspective, Father Emmanuel, exhorts religious leaders - especially his own, not to limit their leadership services to "burying the dead and healing the

wounded", but to be prophetic in identifying the injustices which are the root causes of violence and war and eradicate them through their witness and life.

3. His third perspective is based on the words of his Master Jesus Christ: "Only Truth can make us all free" (Jn.8.32) The historical truth (not myths) about the peoples, about the events of the last fifty years, about the death and suffering caused to innocent lives etc. these would liberate not only Tamils but all the peoples of the country. Myths denying the multi-ethnic, multi-religious nature of the country will only spell disaster for all. Commitment to truth and justice is the backbone to the Tamil struggle. Tamils, Father claims, should not wish for themselves something more than they wish for the others. Tamils wish their Sinhala Buddhist brethren to be a great nation and a religion, but not at the expense of a Tamil destruction.

Just as God, who saw the misery of His people, sent Moses on a mission to Pharo with the words "Let my people go" (Exod. 3.4 -5.1), Father Emmanuel courageously echoes those words of his Master, both to those in Sri Lanka denying justice to his people as well as to the international communities which connive with injustice inflicted on his people.

I remember seeing a large picture of Archbishop Helder Camaras in a corner of Father Emmanuel's Office in the Jaffna Seminary with the following words "When I give food to the hungry they call me a saint, but when I ask why the people are hungry, they call me a communist". These words have truly inspired him to go beyond the humanitarian services, to ask , "why can't the Tamils too, be a people with due human rights in the very land of their birth?"

A F Jeyasegaram

2.12.1997

Tamil Catholic Chaplaincy,
Germany

PEACE AND JUSTICE EMBRACE EACH OTHER



I warmly welcome the publication of some statements and speeches made by Father S. J. Emmanuel during the last two years 1996-7 concerning the ethnic conflict and its tragedies in Sri Lanka.

Besides being a keen observer of the political developments in the country for the last fifty years, he has also been a victim and a witness of the tragic events in the Northeast of Sri Lanka for the last ten years. In his firm belief of the teaching of Lord Jesus that Truth will make us free and Justice is the source of Peace, he cries an immediate halt to all violence and war and pleads for a just peace in our country.

Peace can be achieved neither through a "political game" nor through a war. Peace is the fruit of a collaboration based on truth and justice, between all sectors of good will, and religious leaders have a key role in it.

Father Emmanuel, in his own way as a Catholic priest from among those worst hit by the war, presents his analyses and views to those outside of his context, to the Sinhalese as well as to the international community and pleads for a stable peace that can be the fruit only of justice and truth.

It is unfortunate that there is neither a common clear political stance on this national issue nor a heroic witness to the

same on the part of the Church of Sri Lanka. Although the Church has unreservedly encouraged a negotiated settlement towards peace, one may tend to minimise its involvement, because the suffering, death, destruction and displacement caused by this war has been enormous and catastrophic.

I consider it a privilege to warmly welcome this publication of the collection of his statements and speeches as a valuable contribution in clarifying the just demands of the Tamil people to all those of good will, both within and without the country.

9th.Oct.1997

Rayappu Joseph,
Bishop of Mannar, Sri Lanka

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU WISHES FREEDOM & PEACE



Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Office of the Chairperson
P.O.Box 3162
Cape Town 8000
10th. Dec.1997

It has been a privilege for me to meet with the Rev. Dr. S. J. Emmanuel. He came to see me recently to seek my support and encouragement for the cause of peace and justice in Sri Lanka.

I have long been concerned for this island. I have been aware of the loss of lives and property caused by the prolonged violence and war. I have been aware of the discrimination the Tamils have endured for the last forty years. The majority Sinhalese are in power and are unwilling to extend the political and social rights that they enjoy to the Tamil people. I commend Dr. Emmanuel for his courage and patience in attempting to build

bridges and promote a culture of tolerance and human rights among the people of Sri Lanka of all faiths.

Where there are violations of human rights, Christians have an obligation and responsibility to support the cause of the weak and marginalised. I am impressed by the prophetic witness of Dr. Emmanuel and other religious leaders who support his work.

In South Africa we are immensely grateful to the international community for their support of our struggle for freedom and democracy. Without it we would not have been able to reach a negotiated settlement that has brought new nationhood to our country. I believe that we in South Africa can facilitate negotiation between alienated groups in other countries to bring about peaceful solutions.

It was possible in South Africa after forty years of oppression, intimidation and violence. This gives us hope that peaceful ways can be found to a more just and democratic dispensation elsewhere.

As Christian we have no choice but to follow the Cross in the confidence that evil can never triumph over good, darkness will never extinguish the light. In our struggle I used to hold fast to the scripture, "If God be for us who can come against us?" and it proved true.

I wish you God's power and strength. May He lead you in the way of righteousness and truth and protect you and all His children in Sri Lanka.

God bless you

Sgd. +Desmond Tutu

The most Revd. D.M. Tutu

Archbishop Emeritus

PREFACE

I have seen the long struggle of my people to regain their lost identity and dignity in their own land of birth. As a student in Colombo, I have seen non-violent Tamil politicians (*Satyagrahis*) baton charged and Tamil properties burnt (Colombo, 1956). As a teacher in Jaffna, I have heard the midnight cries of mothers and children baton charged out of their fasting (Jaffna, 1961). And as a church leader I journeyed with 500,000 citizens of Jaffna, chased out of their home town by aerial bombings and artillery shelling. (30th. Oct. 1995) But I have done little to relieve my people from their sufferings or free them from their chains.

Till 1986 my christian ministry of witnessing to truth and justice was largely through theological services at the national and Asian level. But from 1986, I had the privilege of being a little closer to my people. I have heard their agonising cries in the face of hunger, death, destruction and displacements. I have heard them from broken houses, refugee camps and in the thick of jungles. I have heard them at noon-time and at mid-nights. It is there that the Lord said to me "I have heard their cries" It is there that I learnt that the prophetic ministry of Jesus cannot be limited to or exhausted by what I was mostly doing, namely, the doctrinal teaching and preaching of faith and morals. I was getting tired of mere condemnations and exhortations. It has to be a bold witness to Truth, Justice and Freedom, crying out with Moses "Let my people go"

The intransigence of the Government with regard to the rights of the Tamils, the escalating violence of the State and the counter-violence of the Tamil youth, as well as the enormous suffering of the people, demanded from the churches much more than humanitarian services and pastoral work.

Jesus declared his prophetic ministry in clear terms and that ministry is much needed today. To those who believed in Him, he promised " Truth will set you free" Jn.8.32. And before Pilate who questioned his reign, he revealed " For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth (Jn.19. 37). In the synagogue of his home town Nazareth, he gave the manifesto of His mission through the words of prophet Isaiah " The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk.4.18-19)

Convinced as a Christian, that we should not wish for ourselves anything more than what we wish for others, I wish the majority of my countrymen and friends - who are Sinhalese and Buddhists - all success in their efforts to be a great nation and a great religion. Can't I wish the same for my own people?

The Tamils are also a people, a distinct nation with a homeland and have the right to self-determination. These rights are sacred birth-rights which can neither be denied, nor taken away by any power on earth. The State has the duty to recognise and respect these rights. But in Sri Lanka the unfortunate has happened and is continuing to happen.

Hence the Tamils, far from begging for their rights - from the Majority or from the State - are only appealing to reason and sanity, in truth and justice, to recognise and respect their God-given rights. My prayer on the eve of the new millennium is that we may all see the truth, work for justice and that the year of Peace acceptable to the Lord may soon dawn on us.

During the last one year, I was able to share my harrowing experiences at the international level, for the noble cause of the Tamil struggle. Thanks to all those who invited me for the various conferences in almost every continent I thank Father Francis Jeyasegaram and his assistant Mr. Roy Ravindran of the German Tamil Catholic Chaplaincy for publishing a selection of my talks and interviews as a book and to the International Federation of Tamils (London) for launching the same for distribution.

May Truth be accepted and Justice be done
for Peace to be born!

S.J.Emmanuel

16.12.1997 -31st. Anniversary of my priestly ordination

1

AN APPEAL ON BEHALF OF THE VOICELESS MASSES

*As Founder-Director of the Centre for Better Society at
115, Fourth Cross Street, Jaffna, the author sent this
appeal from Jaffna soon after the beginning of Eelam
War II to different parts of the world on June 25, 1990,*

The frightening events of the North-Eastern province urge us to make a fervent appeal on behalf of the voiceless masses, be they Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims, to all Sri Lankans of good will.

After years of death and destruction of lives and property, we were hoping and praying that the lives, already shortened by fears and terrors of war, may still have some chance of peace and stability through the talks which were going on between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government. In spite of criticism and opposition from selfish politicians and others, both sides did well to trust each other and seek a solution

in the interest of peace. But unfortunately the worst happened and once again a war of death and destruction is at our door, if not on our head.

We have survived much strangulation of our lives - through months of curfew, shortages of the essentials of life, communication and transport. We have survived shells, mortars, helicopter firings and aerial bombings. Our survival is a miracle. We are proud of our faith - be it Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Christian - that has kept alive in us an undying hope about a better tomorrow for justice and peace. But have we the physical and moral strength to go through another war? The signs and voices from the top give us only a mortal fear but no assurance of life.

We are already in a coma with minimum facilities of life. We do not even have the strength to speak up for ourselves! Silence in suffering has become the style of our life. We have only one question: Do we still have a future?

It is not our intention here to blame anyone or try to find out who or what went wrong to reverse the valuable dialogue for peace into a war of this magnitude. But amidst the noise of shells, helicopter-firings and aerial bombings, we are fast losing sight of values like truth, justice and respect for life. And time is running out.

Forgive us if we sound too demanding on those who are fortunate to live away from these war-torn territories. But to whom shall we appeal, if not to you our brothers and sisters? With death and destruction at our door, we appeal to all peace loving citizens of this country to listen to the feeble voice of the voiceless masses who are still in their wounds but not yet succumbed to death, to the voiceless masses whose left-over properties have been burnt by the fires of hatred, to the voiceless masses who are screaming into kovils, temples, mosques and schools and spend their days looking up for some food and their nights searching for a safe place to rest.

Some of us may try to wave victory flags from one part or the other. We may try our best to cover up or pretend not to hear

the cry of the voiceless lest our celebrations be disturbed, lest we be forced to sacrifice some of our comforts. But can we really run away from our conscience?

Much harm is done in this world, not by the activity of the bad people, but by the passivity of the good people. The good citizens of this country have surely much more to do for peace and stability than a mere vote at the elections. The silence of these days in the face of massive death and destruction urges us to ask, "What has happened to the moral conscience of our leaders? What has happened to the various welfare organisations? What has happened to our religious leaders who have an obligation to be the makers of peace? What has happened to the professionals and intellectuals who are so enlightened about the rights and duties of citizens? What has happened to the business magnates who are so influential in electing governments? Have they all done their best?

How is it possible that peoples and nations cry out so loudly against a single bomb in the Colombo city or in any other part of the world, including the horror of Oklahoma, but do not condemn the Sri Lankan Government, when its Forces, under the pretext of attacking terrorist bases and under the cover of a strict media blockade, drop not one, but hundreds of bombs and fire thousands of artillery shells over civilian areas day and night,...?

Without communication (no newspapers), without transport facilities, not even hospitals for the dying, we are thirsting for truth as well as for peace. We are gripped with fear and the warring factions only terrify us of a worse future. We see only fear and agony written large on the faces of these masses. We do not have even that sufficient hope to share among us. The warring factions are only forecasting more destruction. They are warning us either to get into a bunker (too costly for an average family) or to move miles away from our homes (impossible for the aged and the sick) so as to escape aerial bombings.

Are we all going to stand by and helplessly witness in silence the horrors of death and destruction? Are we not obliged to cry out that you, who are outside these dark territories of death and destruction, may hear and come to our aid? You, who are fortunate to be living in some peaceful area of this island, you who are privileged to have a say with those who are in power, please consider your obligation for those who are still in pain, if not in a state of coma, for those who are still very young and have a right for the future. Please do not cordon off our areas as troubled spots and continue your lives undisturbed. Please do not allow a decision that amounts to "operation successful but patient (population) died".

We beg all men of good-will in this country, as well as those who ably represent other countries which can influence our decision-makers, to do their best to stop this senseless war in favour of a meaningful dialogue. We have confidence only in your good will to work for peace. As we close this appeal to you around the early hours of Monday (25/6/90) morning, bombs are falling for the last four hours and the population is literally groaning and dying. We may not live to thank you, but we hope that this letter reaches you for your moment of action for a noble cause - LIFE !

**People
who have not actively opposed
the violence of the powerful against the poor,
at some cost to themselves
have no moral authority
to question the violence used by the poor.
-M.Berriman**

2

TAMIL STRUGGLE AND THE CHURCH

*An interview on April 1996 to the New Leader of
Madras, India*

1. How is the Tamil struggle evolving?

The struggle of the Tamils of Sri Lanka to gain their just and democratic rights in their country of birth started immediately after the country's independence from the British in 1948. It has gone through various phases of development according to the political and military responses given by the successive governments of the majority Sinhalese.

Mr SWRD Bandaranaike, the father of the present President, coming to power in 1958 on the crest of Sinhala nationalism and Buddhist chauvinism, made Sinhala as the only official language for the whole country, even for the North and East where most of the people spoke Tamil. Combined with this

move, which started a series of discriminations against the Tamils in the field of education, employment, development etc. was the second move of state-aided colonisation of Tamil-areas with Sinhalese. There was no such state-aided colonisation of Tamils in Sinhala areas. These and other anti-Tamil moves by the successive governments kept on fuelling the Tamil problem to its present state.

The Sinhalese majority, not realising the hardships and humiliation the Tamils were going through, misconstrued Tamil demands for their birth-rights and their democratic protests as against the development and growth of the Sinhala nationhood. Instead of engaging in parliamentary and democratic dialogue with the Tamil leadership to understand their grievances, the Sinhala Governments almost disregarded the Tamil grievances and used military, and even thug, force to oppress and destroy any Tamil opposition. Even Tamil *Sattiyagrahis* were beaten up by the Sinhala-forces in their Tamil capital Jaffna (Dec. 1961)

Undisciplined military actions of the State Forces unbridled or unchecked by the Government soon degenerated into State-terrorism in Tamil areas. Thus Tamil militancy was born as a necessary response to state-terrorism. This truth has been acknowledged only now by the present President.

The Tamil militancy was at first directed against the Tamil politicians who directly supported the SLFP-Government policy of Sinhala-only, and acted against the interests of the Tamils. It was then directed against the undisciplined military that was stationed in the North and was up to looting and killing Tamil civilians. Later it went on to target its attack on those State-aided Sinhala settlements and their armed home-guards. These villages were originally Tamil settlements, but later forcibly taken over by the army and given over for Sinhala settlements.

What was started as a guerrilla war at home against the “betrayers” and the terror of the State Forces, has become a full-scale war between the Tigers and the State forces. The State in trying to wipe out the LTTE, unjustly keeps increasing its repression and restriction on the whole Tamil population. Though claimed to be a war only against the Tigers, the inhuman restricti-

ons imposed on the Tamil population are effecting in practice a slow death for the Tamil people. More than the visible deaths of thousands of combatants and civilians, last thirteen years have seen the throttling of a people by economic embargo, denial of communication, transport, education, social life etc. If this is not a slow genocide, then what is it? Thus the Tamil struggle for their basic rights has become more into a people's struggle for survival.

The military operation, codenamed *Riviresa I*, by the Government Forces at the end of October 1995 militarily drove out the Tamils out of their historic city of Jaffna. The Sinhala Army hoisted its lion Flag over Jaffna, as sign of their conquest. These have given proof of the imperialistic intentions of the Government and has hardened the hearts and minds of the Tamils.

The Tamils entertained great hopes that the Chandrika government will stop the war and talk peace, but they are disappointed. The Tamils have never been so throttled, humiliated and suspected as during this present period.

And the latest military operation *Riviresa II* that began on the 19th. of April 1996 is intended to force back the population that went into exile back into Jaffna. It is another gross violation of human rights. With a strict censorship of the media, the world will never know what happened on the days following 19th. April 1996. By aerial bombing and shelling of Kilali-lagoon, the Army has succeeded in preventing the people from escaping to the mainland under the control of the LTTE. The people cordoned off by the army had no choice but to move into Valikamam (Jaffna). Thus sucking the population back into Jaffna, was a sinister move of the Government to cover up the defeat they suffered earlier in *Riviresa I* when they captured and hoisted their Lion Flag over a ghost-town.

The Army is now operating "a series of checks, especially on young boys and girls" to guarantee that the population of Jaffna be free of the LTTE. While keeping people in army-controlled camps, dead bodies appear on the roads. The anti-LTTE groups who came to assist the Army are taking revenge

on suspected supporters of the LTTE. Under the cover of a strict press-censorship, keeping all journalists away from Jaffna, serious infringements of human rights are carried out by the forces and their aides. The Tamils know by experience what to expect from the Sri Lankan forces. We are back to the sixties sowing the seeds for more Prabaharans of the future.

2. How has been the Church in Sri Lanka responding to the ethnic problem and how would you expect it to respond?

For almost three decades (1956-1983) the Church overlooked the Tamil problem purely as a political one and the massive loss

I wish to state categorically that we Tamils will succeed in our aspirations for freedom and liberation only to the extent that we wish the others...

of Tamil lives and property merely as the deeds of some misguided thugs. Hence it kept away from any serious evaluation of the problem or criticism of any action of the Government. At every anti-Tamil racial riot, it gave help in protecting, housing and feeding those Tamils who

sought refuge in catholic institutions. But it did not have the courage and conviction required of the Church of Christ to question the injustices perpetrated on the Tamils. Injustices to Tamils were not a priority in the agenda of the Sri Lankan Church.

It was only with the holocaust of Tamils in 1983, the Church, came out an year later with a pastoral letter condemning anti-Tamil violence and also suggesting that a political solution be sought through a federal type of government without endangering the unity, integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka. Though it won the praise and approval of the Pope (July 1984), the pastoral letter did not promote any conviction or action neither at the level of the people nor at the level of the hierarchy. The Church preferred to be more like the NGOs "burying the dead, healing the wounded and feeding-clothing-sheltering of the victims of war" rather than becoming a prophetic mediator for peace or an active agitator for Justice.

Though a minority church, it had the resources and the strategy to be “peace-makers”, to link up the Sinhala-Buddhist majority and the Tamil-Hindu minority in a process of dialogue. But, being so long used to an institutional church-life that lives on the generosity of the governments in power and in fear of the majority Buddhists, there was hardly any prophetic courage, as witnessed by some religious leaders in other parts of the world.

A loud condemnation of violence, without lifting a finger to fight against the causes of violence, is pure pharisaism and hypocrisy. What is most needed is to go to the root cause of the violence and try to eradicate the injustices and oppression which the people are suffering and consequently leading them to violence.

One year after the holocaust of July 1983 against the Tamils, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Sri Lanka came out

with a lengthy pastoral letter in which it analysed the causes for conflict and, at least indirectly, gave its support for a federal solution to the ethnic problem. But now, after the present President put forward in August 1995 a set of proposals called the “political package”, the present Conference fell



ahead over heels in supporting too hastily “the package” as the “last chance for peace”. Even the Colombo-based Tamil parties who are partners of the PA Government did that. But the mounting opposition from the Buddhist-Sinhala extremists forced the government to water-

down the package in its legal draft. It has now opted for a “sterile and safe neutrality” that preserves “the unity, sovereignty and integrity” of Sri Lanka, without taking a clear and strong stance neither on the side of the oppressed nor against a war that is intrinsically evil.

The present Pope has exhorted the whole world, and in particular the Sri Lankan Church, “if you want peace, work for justice”. We in Sri Lanka have issued condemnations of violence, and even doled out some foreign aid to the refugees but not dared to engage in active and daring mediation on behalf of justice for peace. Hence what seems to be desired by the Church is, not the stable peace built on justice, but only a permanent cease-fire that will not disturb the life-style of the people, especially of the church.

At the historic National Pastoral Convention of the whole Church of Sri Lanka, which opened on the very day (19.4.1995) when the fragile cessation of hostilities between the Government and the LTTE ended, the Convention unanimously and enthusiastically resolved to “Becoming a Church for Peace in Sri Lanka”. Catholics, both Sinhalese and Tamils, were exhorted to become communicators of truth on both sides of the divide, to become mediators between warring factions, to dispel fears and biased views etc. But hardly anything was done.

In fact, while the Church of the South gave its unhidden support of blood and cash donations for “a war for peace” as proposed by the Government (Colombo, 2nd. Dec. 1995), the Church of the North in its letter to both President and Prabaharan has unequivocally condemned the war and all forms of violence and called for peace talks. Now who is for peace and who is for war?

In the context of these developments, many Tamil Christians are convinced that the unity and integrity of the country can be preserved, not by centralised government of the majority Sinhalese condescending to devolve a little power down to the Tamils and other peripheral groups but only by a meaningful devolution that recognises the mutual sovereignty of the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In other words, the Tamils in general and the Tamil Christians in particular, think it is far better to live in

charity as two nations of one country united in building the country by peaceful collaboration and exchanges rather than live in mutual hatred and fear under one centralised sovereignty.

Personally I am more than convinced that the Sinhalese and Tamils can live peacefully and collaborate with one another, with all their complimentary resources to make this isle a paradise of peace, if they can only agree to live together, not on top of one another, but with each other, in mutual recognition of one another, in adjoining houses or compounds and manage most of their affairs with rights and dignity due to two mature ethnic groups.

Those who are against such a peaceful co-existence and collaboration are of two types. On one side there are those who deny all history and think that the whole country "has been, is and will be for ever" Sinhala-Buddhist and not an inch be given to these Tamils. And on the other side there are those Sinhalese and Tamils, mostly English-educated with christian influence living in the Capital, who think that the present colonially-initiated centralised administration in Colombo, which favours their elitistic lifestyle but does injustices to the peripheries, must continue. The latter were once unconsciously instrumental in imposing a British-colonial administrative unity for the whole country. Church leadership usually prefers to continue the traditional structures, even if it be a denial of justice to some people.

3. You have been often championing the causes of the Tamils. It is often construed as a pro-LTTE stand. Your comments?

Yes. It is the just cause of the down-trodden Tamils I am concerned with. It is an injustice of inhuman discriminations made by the majority Sinhala government as against the Tamils for the last forty years in the very country of their birth. As a Christian and a priest I cannot but support the cause of justice and stand up against all forms of injustices and discriminations.

I am not giving into narrow communalism. Injustices whether among the Tamils or the Sinhalese have to be opposed. I

will expect any Christian or priest, Sinhalese or Tamil, to stand up for justice and fight injustices of all forms and in all sectors - social(caste), political(human rights) or economic (open-economy, bribery/corruption). There are some who have and are still championing the cause of justice for the poor. The late Fr. Michael Rodrigo, late Bishops Leo Nanayakara and Lakshman Wickremesinghe, Frs Tissa Balasuriya omi, Paul Caspeerz sj and Oswald Firth omi from the South and late Frs. M. Bastian and Chandra Fernando, Donald Kanagaratnam from the North and East are some of the few priests and bishops worth mentioning. But still a lot more has to be done with great risk and inconvenience for the sake of truth and racial justice in Sri Lanka.

Just because the LTTE is the de facto leadership of the Tamils that articulates the rights of the Tamils, people tend to label even the others who articulate the same rights, as pro LTTE. I have no ties with the LTTE. I hold no brief for the LTTE. But as a Tamil citizen and a catholic priest living in the North I accept the de facto leadership of the LTTE. Just as my colleagues accept the Government in Colombo. I am among the very few Catholic clergymen who have lived through this problem along with the people first during my university days in the fifties and then during my career as a Lake House journalist before I entered the ministry. Hence I am convinced through historical facts.

If by pro-LTTE is meant the identification and approval of all that is done by the LTTE, it is unjust to call me so. If it means that I espouse the same goal, namely, the right of self-determination, nationhood, and a secure homeland for the Tamils, then I am like the many hundreds of thousands of Tamils here. Very recently (15.4.1996) the Bishop, priests and religious of the Church of Jaffna have issued a statement to the effect that we support the Tamil struggle and condemn the war and other violations of human rights. Some extremists from the South might say that the Northern Church is also pro-LTTE!

On the other hand, it can be noted in passing that if all those who stand for the Tamil cause are labelled as pro-LTTE, it only means (1) that the Tamil cause, at least in the present phase of the long struggle, is championed only by the LTTE and (2) that the LTTE are the de facto leaders of the Tamils of North and East.

As I explained above, there is a genuine Tamil cause and a Tamil struggle, much larger than the LTTE and with a longer history. Successive Governments, by their undemocratic and inhuman military oppression, amounting often to state-terrorism, have provoked a militant phase in the Tamil struggle. This militancy has grown to be a challenge to the military might of the state. Hence the Government, in order to get international sympathy and support, has conveniently labelled the Tamil problem as mere terrorism. It rejects international offers for mediation or solution of the basic problem and continues to beg for money and arms to fight terrorism. At the present moment, all the Tamils, even those of the South who have supported the present Government to victory, are suspected by no less a person than the President, to be pro-LTTE merely because of their silence! (In an interview on the 27th. of March 1996 to Ms Malini Parthasarathy of The Hindu, pp.12,15)

4. What is your opinion on the modus operandi of the LTTE?

The modus operandi of the LTTE has been determined largely by two factors: On one side there was the frustrating futility of twenty five years (1956 - 1983) of democratic and non-violent struggle of the Tamil political parties to win the basic human rights of the Tamils; and on the other side there was the escalation of destructive racial riots of Sinhala masses against innocent Tamils and the cruelty of state-terrorism practised in Tamil areas.

After a long democratic and non-violent struggle for their rights, and as a nation of youth set against the walls without any future in education and employment, they took up the arms. Though as a Christian and a priest I condemn violence and do not subscribe to it as a means to an end, yet I can understand how the Tamil youth, pushed to the extremes of desperation and self-defence, have taken up arms against a terrorising army. I sympathise deeply with the loss of lives on both sides of

the divide, especially those who die thinking that they are giving their lives for the country of their birth.

At the beginning for almost three decades (1955 - 1983) when Sinhala mobs laid hands on innocent Tamils, the State Forces were standing by, if not aiding and abetting. Later, the violence started by the Sri

Though the de-facto leadership has become a militant one, the mandate they carry is an approved mandate of the Tamil people. They are consistent in articulating the demands of the Tamil people, and it is impossible to buy them over with privileges of ministerial posts as was done by the previous governments...

Lankan State Forces stationed in Tamil areas against the innocent and unarmed Tamils, who were asking for their basic human rights in the country of their birth, reached an extreme in the eighties. The Government-controlled Colombo media kept all these hidden in the dark. The Sinhala press was far from reporting any of these "heroic deeds" of

the 'boys'. And the LTTE found that only counter violence, i.e., the revolutionary violence can contain state violence. Since then it has become a spiral of violence in which both sides go on and on with attacks and retaliations. The responsibility of courageously stepping out of this spiral of violence rests with the very forces who started it and not with the oppressed who only responded to it in their defence.

Hence I condemn the spiral of violence and war. Though the government has proclaimed it as a "war for peace" to save its face before world, to make easy purchase of arms and to quieten the unscrupulous public of the South, the war is evidently self-destructive for the whole country and genocidal for the Tamils in particular. I condemn unequivocally the war and the connected violations of human rights, both in the North and in the South - especially the crimes committed against truth under the cover of a total press-censorship.

Many of us from the North, especially of the church, have called upon the government to stop the war and start negotiations with the help of a mediating agent. The Tigers too have openly asked the war to be stopped and peace negotiations be taken up with third party mediation. But the government is ignoring these calls. It wants to remain in the spiral of violence and to go on with the war till they have annihilated the LTTE and established the military victory. I am afraid that the operation may succeed but the patient would be dead long before.

5. Your comment on the recent Exodus?

This historic exodus of nearly 500,000 people out of their homes by an army of occupation is totally inhuman. Because of an army that was approaching with continuous firing of artillery shells and aerials bombings, we were forced to flee within a short time with our minimum belongings. The agony, the tragedy and the humiliation we all suffered only because a Sinhala army wanted to capture Jaffna, the historic capital of the Tamils, and arrogantly plant the lion flag over it as a sign of the neo-Sinhala imperialism are unimaginable. The government proclaimed their military attack on Jaffna as not against the Tamils, but against the LTTE. They proclaimed that they were going to liberate the Tamils from the LTTE and then liberate Jaffna from the LTTE. All this is nonsense and unbecoming of a democratic government. We fled not at the gun point of the Tigers as the government later made out, nor did we do so on the advice of the army, but simply for our survival from the shells and bombs of the Sri Lankan army.

The Government has captured an empty city, except for the sick and the aged who were unable to move. Even today it has not allowed the journalists of Colombo to visit Jaffna and tell the world the whole truth about this army occupation. For me it was a blunder and has wounded us deeply to think that we have been chased off and our houses and property damaged and looted.

The people, living in exile in the other parts of the peninsula and in the Wanni region, without proper facilities and a series of shortages are experiencing a slow death. More than the numbers getting killed in the war-front on both sides, very little notice is taken of the thousands who are slowly dying due to the lack of proper medicines, nourishment, shelter from inclement weather etc. The fact that the Government is restricting even the humanitarian services rendered by the NGOs like UNHCR, ICRC, OXFAM, SCF, MSF etc. makes me suspect slow genocide.

People by thousands have demonstrated and cried aloud for a stopping of the war and for starting of a peace process. They do not have the minimum strength to face up to another major attack by the government, even if it is proclaimed as for their liberation. But the Government is unashamedly determined, in spite of its bankrupt economy, to escalate the war with foreign assistance and crush, not simply the Tigers but the will of the people for freedom.

Riviresa II that began on 19.4.1995 is again shelling and bombing the population to return to the army occupied areas. The army is determined to force the people back into Valikamam and exercise their military authority over them. A fear-filled population, weakened for almost six months by an exilic life of dire needs, is moving into Valikamam and the army is welcoming them as a victory for them for their operation. Why can't they leave the inhabitants of Valikamam to look after their own life? Is the hoisting of the Lion Flag and the presence of the Sinhala army the indispensable ingredient for life in the North? That was how it all started in the sixties and we seem to be back in square one.

There is an obligation on the part of the warring factions to stop this war and start negotiations for peace. The last round of peace talks failed because the LTTE pulled out of it. Why did they pull out? On the part of the Government, there was no good will to implement even the things that were agreed on and gazetted. The army was unwilling to give what the Government agreed. Because of the LTTE pull out, the Government proclaims that the LTTE cannot be trusted. How many times has the Government of Sri Lanka torn up even pacts agreed and went back on promises? Hence without much fuss, the Government must agree for talks

with the LTTE with the help of a third party to avoid unnecessary accusations thereafter.

Secondly the climate for talks must be created. The Tamils are burdened with an inhuman economic embargo for the last five years. This must be lifted and people must have facilities to live as human beings.

Thirdly, the blunder of the take over of Jaffna at the cost of heavy destruction to the buildings of the city must be rectified.

For this we neither expect nor want the army to build up the Jaffna they burnt and destroyed. We want them to move back, at least, to their original camps at Palaly, if not outside of the

Along with half a million people, I was displaced from Jaffna on the night of the 30th. of October 1995. It was the worst that has happened in the whole history of the country and in the history of our people for the last 2000 years. We survived the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial conquests for nearly 450 years, but we fled the inhumane Sri Lankan Army.

North. People will move back freely and slowly without any fear or force and they should be helped with finance and material the Government has already received from foreign governments to rebuild their homes and settle down.

When the people move back into Jaffna, the LTTE personnel or the LTTE ideals may move in with them. People cannot be prevented from having dreams and ideals. They cannot be completely separated from their own sons and daughters as the government envisages. Even if the Tigers are forced by military might to retreat into the jungles, they will continue to be the one leadership that articulates the aspirations of the Tamils and has sacrificed their lives in thousands for those ideals. Hence the Sri Lankan government must have talks with them, not with any pseudo leadership on Colombo.

6. How does the ethnic conflict affect theological teaching?

The context in which we can do theology and teach theology have changed gradually during the last two decades. The Tamil Christians who have been subjected to various hardships and slaveries during the last forty years have begun to see the hand of God in their journey for liberation. The traditional celebration of Christian mysteries such as incarnation and pascha have now received a natural back drop in the life situations of people. They need neither to imagine or portray scenes of the Old Testament or of the New Testament of the Bible, with pictures, cribs and symbols. Their whole life situations and events have taken the form of real liberation-events. Hence we have started theologising in our context of a journey of liberation.

The life experiences with the people have become the *locus theologicus* and the solidarity and dialogue with them has become the method of theologising. It is that theology from below that can meaningfully and relevantly animate and strengthen the hope of a people journeying through difficulties.

7. What is your expectation from India, from the Indian Church?

We need that India as a mother-country to the ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka, and as a major power in the region, understand the ethnic problem objectively from the point of view of all Sri Lankans and help in a just manner to solve it without having other ulterior or selfish gains in view.

In the past, it has been said that its involvement was determined by its own interests and has caused more confusion and trouble. India is entertaining fears that encouraging full autonomy for the Tamils of Sri Lanka will encourage Tamil Nadu for break-up from the rest of India. But it fails to take into due consideration the long Sinhala oppression and hostility that has caused the slow death of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu has no such hostility from the neighbours.

Watching the immense loss of lives and the flow of blood during the last thirteen years, India must rethink its stand, repent for the havoc caused by the IPKF(Indian Peace Keeping Force), forgive past mistakes and with magnanimity help this small country to reach a peaceful settlement. I do not see the need for any Indian military intervention nor for any military assistance to Sri Lanka. It is strongly suspected that Indian military assistance by way of hard-ware ammunitions, advice and pilots are much used in the attacks against us.

Although the Tamil bishops of Sri Lanka took very little interest or offered very little assistance by way of sending priests to look after the refugees, the Tamil Nadu church has done well to give its services to the refugees. For this service, the Tamil Catholics are grateful. We would expect that the Indian Church continue their humanitarian services to the refugees still left there, without giving into false propaganda made by the Sri Lankan Government and by the anti-LTTE political parties in India. The refugees from the coastal districts of northern Sri Lanka are largely catholic and need the understanding and assistance of the church in India.

Unity of the country is not threatened by two nations living as peaceful neighbours but only by two nations living as master and slave or on the throat of one another.

Secondly the focus of theological thinking in South India has been the poor and the oppressed. The birth of 'Dalit' theology is a consequence of it. The historic exodus of the Tamils from Sri Lanka, the displacement and dispersion of people, the destruction of the heritage of the people including churches - these have given rise to new thinking about the various liberation struggles we are called to wage in our Tamil world, against casteism, poverty, denial of human rights etc. As a fertile soil for theological reflections, Indian theologians also must take up the study of Tamil liberation in Sri Lanka and offer a Christian impetus towards those seeking freedom.

8. Any other comments?

Today (19.4.1996) on the anniversary of the beginning of Eelam war 111, the state media has announced curfew over Jaffna peninsula and in Wanni, that is practically the whole of the North, and has started aerial bombing and shelling. It has heavily bombed and blocked the Kilaly sea-route that connects the Jaffna peninsula to the mainland Wanni. Only a few thousands were able to cross over to Wanni through the dangerous lagoon. It looks as if the army is determined to continue it's military oppression and occupation of the North. Already it has, besides the Eastern province, many parts of the northern islands, Valikamam, Valikamam East and now Thenmarachchi. In other words a Sinhala army is bringing under its military administration most of the Tamils and their homeland. What do they want to achieve?

The Army is clueless as to what the end is going to be. General Ratwatte has a military plan to subjugate a land and a people. Beyond that, nothing! And President Chandrika? This military approach against a people crying for peace, points to the under-skirt of her much-loved project, namely, **War For Peace**. IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT CHANDRIKA'S PEACE THROUGH WAR MEANS THAT SHE FIRST WANTS TO FRIGHTEN THE TAMILS AND SUBJUGATE THEM THROUGH HER MILITARY OPPRESSION, AND THEN WANTS THEM TO ACCEPT, WITH BOTH HANDS, AND ON THEIR KNEES, THE PEACE-PACKAGE AS PROPOSED AND FINALISED BY HER AND HER PEOPLE, IRRESPECTIVE OF ANY CONSULTATION WITH TAMIL LEADERS - NEITHER WITH HER STOOGES IN COLOMBO NOR WITH THE LTTE IN THE NORTHEAST.

God save us, not only from these foreign bombs and shells rained on us, but also from such „humiliating slaveries“ packeted as „peace-proposals“ and imposed on us against our will. Most Tamils prefer to be the head of a dog or a tiger than to be the tail of an elephant or a lion!

3

LET MY PEOPLE GO

*An Address delivered to the International Conference
on Justice and Peace organized by the Australian
Human Rights Foundation and the Australian Fede-
ration of Tamils on June 27 - 28, 1996 in Canberra*

1. Witness to Truth for Peace in Sri Lanka

I am happy to participate and to make a personal appeal on behalf of my people at this Conference. I stand here before you, neither as a politician nor as a political scientist, not even as a representative of any political group or movement in Sri Lanka, but solely as a Tamil Catholic Priest from the North of Sri Lanka. From 1956 onwards, I have been a keen observer of the political events in our country. A good fifteen years of my priestly life has been spent at Ampitiya at educating hundreds of Catholic priests - Sinhalese and Tamils - for the Church in Sri Lanka. Since 1986 I have the privilege of being close to my suffering people.

Presently, as a religious leader moving along with my people in their search for self-respect and freedom, and serving them in my Christian way in their agonies of the war, my ideal for participation in the struggle and service is Jesus Christ. He, who came to liberate mankind from the slaveries of sin and death and offer them the freedom and the dignity of the children of God, has solemnly declared that **Truth will make us free**. Hence our commitment to Truth.

He has also taught in his Sermon on the Mount that **Blessed are the Peace Makers**, and by the supreme sacrifice of his life, He established Himself as the **Peace-Maker par excellence** for the whole humanity. Hence our commitment to Peace-making.

In attempting to articulate my thoughts here on the theme of this Conference, I can only give witness to Truth on behalf of the many millions of Sri Lankans who are **thirsting for Peace and Reconciliation**. At a point in history, when my people are subject to immense hardships, made to carry unbearable burdens for being Tamil and struggling to survive an inhuman war, paradoxically termed as a “War for Peace”, I am happy to serve them with my voice for Truth, Justice and Peace.

By reason of my provenience and profession, I prefer to give my Christian witness to some of the salient Truths about the contextual realities I am called to experience those truths from within the society. And they are so indispensable for finding a lasting Peace in the country. But they are unfortunately turned and twisted by unscrupulous politicians and selfish media personnel for their selfish motives.

2. We are Genuinely Thirsting for a Lasting Peace

A blatant lie has been let loose by some pseudo-lovers of Peace that the Tamils living in the North are against Peace. It has been the fashion of some Sri Lankans living outside the war zones to speak of themselves as the genuine lovers of Peace and to cast doubts and even suspicion, on the peace-motives of those living

in the North and East. Some have even gone to the extent of suspecting the very people suffering and dying in war as lovers of war and have even posed the question - Are the Tamils of the North and East for Peace?! Let it be clearly known to the world, and I say it with all the strength of my conviction, that none in Sri Lanka could thirst for Peace as much as we Tamils who are still surviving in the North and East do.

And the reason why we are so strongly motivated for peace, is not for any material gain of our prospective investments in a peaceful Sri Lanka, as may be wished for by some local and foreign agents.

Nor are we so motivated merely by a desire for development and improvement of the quality of our life in Sri Lanka. We want Peace because we are dying in War. We want Peace because we have lost all our dear and near ones in



this senseless war. We want Peace because War is suffocating us into extinction. We want Peace because that alone is the natural space for human life with dignity and self-respect. We want Peace because it is our existential right.

The proud proclamation that only the Government was committed to Peace and that the LTTE was not, is not tenable. The break-down of Peace-talks on the 19th. of April 1995, has been often made out to be entirely due to the intransigence of the LTTE's and its non-commitment to Peace. To those who have read through the letters exchanged between the partners to the conflict, and observed closely the slow progress made by the talks, it was clear that the LTTE could not be pressurized to discuss a

long-term political package when the people were being pushed more and more to the borders of survival by the inhuman economic embargo on the basic necessities of life. The evident question on the minds of the people during the talks was about the good faith of a Government that was promising bold political changes in favour of a solution of the Tamil problem but unable to lift the inhuman ban on such simple items like confectioneries, white cloth, tyre-tubes and fuel. The partial lifting of the economic ban on these items for a few months and the re-imposition of it on the very day of the break-down of talks confirmed the suspicion of the people about the bona fides of the Government.

3. The Self-Contradictory Option of A War For Peace

After having come to power on the promise of "Peace and No More War" and unable to keep up even the gazetted assurances given to the Tamil people related to their basic needs for survival, the Government once again, after a brief interval of three months, returned to a total throttling of the people with its inhuman and unreasonable economic embargo. A real effort for Peace should have been an unconditional lifting of the embargo, restoring the basic human needs of the population and then talking about a political settlement of the long-standing national problems. But the Government appeared to be interested in holding a military threat over the heads of the Tamil population and force down on the Tamils the Government's own political solution. This is totally unacceptable to the Tamils.

In order to placate the thousands of Tamils who voted for the Peace-proclamations of the Government and to cover up its militaristic agenda before the international community, a more insidious and self-contradictory option was made by the Government and was displayed to the world as a new discovery in the long history of humanity - **War for Peace!**

Her Excellency the President, has been bending backwards trying her best to justify the military operations as part of a war that she is forced to wage because of her sincere search for Peace. The declared intentions of this War for Peace were very attractively formulated to defend the escalation of War and to deceive the donor countries into giving aid for more sophistica-

ted ammunitions. Without revealing the exact reasons for the break-down of Peace-talks and resumption of hostilities, it was declared as

1. A War thrust on the Government by the LTTE.
2. A War directed not against the Tamils but against the LTTE
3. A War to liberate the Tamils from the clutches of the LTTE
4. A War to annihilate or weaken the LTTE
5. A War to force the LTTE to the negotiating table.

But the military occupation of Jaffna, the hoisting of the Lion Flag over a ghost town, the Riviresa II Operation to trap the people into the Army command, the denial of food to those who crossed over to Wanni in the Riviresa II Operation - all these disprove the intentions of the War for Peace and reveal the hidden agenda of the Government for a subjugation of the Tamils under a military rule.

4. The Lies Shrouding the Option and its Declared Intentions

A self-contradictory objective of achieving Peace through War can only be sustained by falsehoods. And the subsequent escalation of war by the Government under the pretext of reaching out for Peace has progressively revealed the hidden intentions of the Governments. We mention a few to illustrate our point.

4.1 Announcing non-events

The military offensive "Leap Forward" was launched in its first phase on the early hours of July 9th. 1995. Although the Government and its media long after its inception announced a curfew over Jaffna and spoke of helicopters having dropped handbills warning the civilians to take refuge in kovils and churches, no such things ever happened. No helicopter ever flew over Jaffna on the 8th. of July and no handbill was dropped anywhere over the Jaffna Peninsula. This talk about a warning to the

public was a total lie and hundreds of thousands of people who woke up that night to flee away from the army shelling bear witness to this.

4.2 Government's Fury at Unfavorable Truths

The unwillingness on the part of the Government and its media to believe the truth of what was happening in the war zone is incredible. With regard to an incident where a Puccara aircraft dropped more than six bombs on a crowd of refugees in the precincts of St. Peter and Paul Church at Navaly and where more than 120 died and about 200 badly wounded, the Government was trying to get away from blame first by saying that it was the work of the LTTE. When that failed it started accusing those who passed the truth to the international community. It is indeed a shame for the Government to rely entirely on its military report and overlook the reports of direct and credible witnesses of the Church and the ICRC. The burst of fury on the part of the Government against the reports of the ICRC, the Church and the BBC showed beyond doubt how far it is hostile to truths not in its favour.

4.3 Immorality of Conducting Military Operations Behind Closed-Doors

Ever since the struggle turned into a war in the North and East, there has been a muzzling of the Truth by the Media which were largely under the control of the Government. This became a frequent censorship of the press as well as prevention of foreign diplomats and journalists to the war-zones. But this has been further tightened to become a semi-permanent censorship on all media and a prevention of all journalists - local and foreign - to the North. As a result the media are made either to echo like parrots the military tailored reports or to speculate at random from their air-conditioned offices about the events in the war-zones. Unlike the media personnel of other countries who risk a lot to venture into war zones and enrich themselves with objective reports, most of the local media personnel have come to accept passively the reports of the military as the truth. In other words,

under the guise of a danger to security arrangements, the Military enjoys a free hand to conduct this war, behind tightly closed doors. Hence the government not only abuses its power in muzzling the truth but also connives with the atrocities committed by the Army.

By conducting this war behind closed doors, the Government was manipulating factual truths to muster support for the war locally and internationally and to win cheap ammunitions from abroad. But we, who are caught in the thick of war and experience the horrors from day to day, and consider our survival as a continuous miracle, cannot be fooled for ever.

4.4 The Historic Exodus caused by the Military Occupation

Having had a bitter experience of the presence and activities of the Sri Lankan Army on their soil for decades and a fearful mind fraught with unforgettable lessons of death, destruction, loot, rape, bribery etc. the population of Jaffna made more dense by waves of displacements as a result of previous military operations, was now treated with a much more frightening and fatal experience. For almost two weeks the aerial, naval and land operations of Riviresa I thundered and shuddered and the people trembled and shivered. The whole Peninsula was vibrating day and night with the tremors of the aerial bombs and artillery shells which were directed to scare and drive away the people from the approaching State Forces. How could the population survive such an attack and wait for their "military liberators" to arrive?

On the 30th. of October 1995, the warning was made and it was a necessary one: "The State Forces are approaching the town of Jaffna and the LTTE will be fighting tooth and nail to defend it. It is advisable to move to safer areas of Thenmaraadchi.." it said. This was enough to move a whole population into a panic-stricken exodus. There were no forcing or threats from the LTTE as made out by mischievous pro-government persons living far away from the North. Nor is there any truth in their claims that it was the State /forces which advised the people to move away from Jaffna for safety and security. When there is a fatal

threat to life, it is the duty of any responsible leadership to give the warning with clarity and sternness and even help people to move out of the danger zone. And this was done by the LTTE.

It is true that this exodus for safety caused much hardships, especially for the old and the sick and deprived many of their belongings. But what was the alternative left to the people other than fleeing away from bombs and shells?

Half a million citizens of Sri Lanka, born and bred on that God-given sacred soil of the Jaffna Peninsula, which they loved as their motherland, cultivated and brought forth fruits for the

...If by pro-LTTE is meant the identification and approval of all that is done by the LTTE, it is unjust to call me so. If it means that I espouse the same goal, namely, the right of self-determination, nationhood, and a secure homeland for the Tamils, then I am like the many hundreds of thousands,

whole island for many generations - this homeland adorned with beautiful houses and gardens and cultivation - all fruits of the labors of generations of Tamils - had to be abandoned in one night to an Army advancing to conquer and devastate that sacred city of Jaffna and hoist a

Lion Flag on it. Generations of Tamils cannot forget this shameful and imperialistic act of the Sri Lankan Government.

Thousands of senior citizens who have served the Government by their dedicated services for many decades, were on the road, literally shivering and starving for days till they found another shelter. Mothers with their babies in hands crying for food were looking up to the dark clouds for relief. Boys and girls, who have been hard hit for decades by unjust discriminations with regard to their studies, who were literally burning bottles of costly kerosene oil to study hard and assure some success for their future, were now humiliated and chased away from their motherland - to carry not their books, but the old and the sick on their bicycles to safer places.

Even these cries of this half a million people wandering for safety did not move the hearts of the Government. Beaten to

shame by the capture of an empty city, it reacted angrily even to the magnanimous appeal made by the UN Secretary General for aid to the displaced victims. Disturbed by the fact that the exodus was internationalizing the Tamil problem, it was splitting hairs over the numbers and questioning whether they were refugees or displaced people. It was questioning the figures supplied by the NGOs and Government Agents and making its own logic without any statistical data, thus refusing to allow relief measures needed by the victims. Thanks to the efforts of all the NGOs - foreign and local - which rushed food and shelter and help survive a majority of these.

4.5 Trapping the owners to occupy their houses

After six months the Forces launch another military operation Riviresa II on the displaced population. This time the intention was declared to be again the liberation of the people from the clutches of the LTTE. But the truth of what happened or how it happened has not been told. The State-media, which gave no pictorial publicity to the pathetic exodus of half a million people was now publishing coloured photographs of returning refugees. Where was this media when the people fled in fear and sought shelter on the roads and struggled for survival?

The Forces were advancing from the North into Thenmaradchy. Thousands fled further South to cross over Kilali and go to Wannai. But the aerial bombing at Kilali destroying boats killing many civilians, left no choice for the people. Instead of continuing a very hard life in their displacements in Thenmaradchi, they preferred to move into their own broken homes. Now when the Government wanted to take this return to Jaffna as a military victory, the figures given by the Government swell to great heights making us all wonder whether an exiled population has doubled in size!

With regard to the return of the displaced people to the Jaffna Peninsula, it must be said in all fairness, that a people having lived for about six months under trying conditions of food, clothing and shelter, naturally grabbed the first chance to return to their homes, even if they had been badly damaged and robbed.

They were not running into the arms of their lovers. But into their natural habitat even if it had been raped by the presence of an army of occupation.

5. Treating the Tamil Problem as Terrorism is Denying to the Tamils their Right of Peace

In the above perspective, the negligence of the successive Governments in Sri Lanka, in not finding a solution to the problems of the Tamils, in denying the basic rights of the Tamils, in escalating the Tamil struggle from its non-violent and democratic stages to become a war of death and destruction - all these amount to denying to the Tamils their very existential right to have Peace.

Everyone admits that the Government has a right to rectify its international image that has been tarnished by the series of anti-Tamil riots and the holocaust of 1983. But this is done unfortunately at the expense of the Tamils and their cause for Truth and Justice. In exaggerating the consequences of a guerrilla warfare, the Government may succeed in justifying before the world all its military actions against the Tamils, even those which easily qualify to be none other than state-terrorism. But the cumulative effect of all these on the world has been to project a wrong image of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as terrorists and war-lovers.

6. Winning the Hearts and Minds of a People by the "Back-Door"

Winning the hearts and minds of the Tamils has been an oft repeated slogan of the Government in its efforts to resolve the ethnic crisis. We Tamils are understandably suspicious of this goal and we are proved to be more than right by the events taking place in the North. It is the undeclared intention of all politicians of the world to win the hearts and minds of their constituencies. But when a Government goes for it, the motives are suspect. It does not require much intelligence from a wife to understand the

hidden agenda of a cruel husband when he suddenly turns round to shower some gifts and privileges.

After denying foreign aid for any development of the North and East for many decades, and even denying the basics for life by an inhuman economic embargo for over five years, suddenly relief and rehabilitation financed by some benevolent countries are rushed to the North. And a people pushed to the ground by starvation and dearth of essential items for survival, quite naturally grab this little aid with sigh of relief. But this should not be interpreted as opting to live under an army-rule.

And as it stands today, it is the Army that is given this non-enviable task of winning the hearts and minds of a war-weary people languishing on the borders of existence. A few smiles and some nice words in Tamil from a Sinhala army may sound sweet and enticing for a few days. And vice versa, a grateful response from the Tamil residents for sparing their lives from their weapons may be satisfying to the weary soldier. But this sudden relationship created by force of events and hidden agenda cannot last. A soldier is a combatant. And a Sri Lankan soldier has been selected, trained and commissioned to be an anti-Tamil combatant. He cannot overnight become the angel of Peace in the war-torn areas. When the very architects and agents of war who for decades have bombed and killed and destroyed and instilled only fatal horror into the hearts and minds of the Tamil people turn over-night into smiling friends and benevolent donors of gifts, it is but sound common sense to raise suspicions about their hidden intentions.

We have been made to suffer for the last forty years as a people and forced to pay with our lives for being a people. Now we want to live as a people....

Can a military that was recruited, trained commissioned to fight and kill turn out to be peace-makers? And this explains clearly the meaning the Government is giving to its declared intention of the "War for Peace". It is not a preparatory phase before a political settlement nor a military way of imposing on the heads of an unwilling people a political solution prepared,

discussed and defined by the will of the majority. It is a pure military solution in which the fighting is suspended and the army takes over the governance of the people. We asked for our rights and a peaceful environment to live and the government generously offers us an option between military action and military governance!

7. Peace as the Fruit of Truth and Justice

If peace is conceived as the outcome of doing justice to the truth of realities, then all genuine lovers of peace must at all cost shun untruth and injustice. Pope John Paul has called upon the world in one of his messages for World Day of Peace : **If you want Peace, work for Justice.** All are lovers of Peace, but few are the workers for Peace. All dislike war and condemn violence, but few are engaged in removing the root causes of war and violence. Paying lip service to Peace, Justice and Truth is not enough. In fact, those who stop with such lip service are hypocrites. And even religious leaders are not exempt from such hypocrisy.

In this context of a prolonged war and violence, the religious leaders of the country have a primary obligation in assuring the indispensable ingredients for true Peace, namely, Truth and Justice. It is they who have to interpret their religious teachings in the context of the present day realities. It is they who have to read the signs of the times and interpret them in service to the happiness, especially of the suffering mankind. Thus they are called to take the lead even at the cost of their lives in exposing the historical and contextual truths concerning the ethnic situation and stand up for Truth and Justice.

The four great religions in Sri Lanka should support and uphold these values of Truth and Justice which are indispensable ingredients for Peace. Many of our religious leaders see the evil, but stop with mere condemnation of it. They do not go to the root causes such as injustices and discriminations. They do not act courageously enough to denounce and protest against those injustices and discriminations. Just to cite a recent example - a venerable and educated monk in an interview with the Press, stated that Sri Lanka was a Sinhala-Buddhist country and that the Tamil

problem should be settled by Minister in charge of the war and that he should be given all powers to do it! Such religious leaders can only lead the country to ruin.

8. Prospects for a Dialogue for Peace

We believe in a Dialogue and not in a war or violence as the way to Peace. Allow me to quote what Pope John Paul II said in one of his Messages for the World Day of Peace. "Dialogue is the Way to Peace and this Peace presupposes the search for what is true".

But what is the commitment of the Sri Lankan Government to Truth? Can an active hiding of the Truth and a closing of the access to Truth be in the interest of Peace?

The Press Censorship, the prevention of foreign diplomats or journalists into war zones, the disabling of the NGOs working for the people, the continued economic embargo on the people, and the military occupation of the Jaffna Peninsula - all these unfortunately point to a military approach by the Government. Although a two-pronged approach was earlier proclaimed as the Government's approach, the recent events have clearly shown the option for a military approach.. It refuses to see the Tamil problem as the root cause of the present war. It labels the Tamil problem as pure terrorism, and goes ahead with its war.

The attitude of the Government to relief and rehabilitation work done by the NGOs in the Wanni district reveals a further aspect of the hidden agenda of the Government. The NGOs which shifted their offices into Vadamaradchi and Thenmaradchi and Wanni were trying to respond to the crying needs of the people. But many of them were in many ways handicapped or even prevented, from having all the necessary apparatus for communication and freedom of moving their aid from the South to the people in need.

After the military victory over the ghost-town of Jaffna and getting the people trapped in the Peninsula, the Government is at present making available some basic needs probably bought

with foreign aid as a fore-runner to imposing its own political solution on the people. In short, it intends to eliminate or weaken any leadership among the people and have its own way of enslaving the people by back-door gifts. Probably with the hope of settling the Tamil problem just by some enticing gifts to an enslaved population, it is turning a deaf-ear to the more serious international appeals for Peace-talks and international mediation.

9. Conclusion: An Appeal for Truth and Justice

From the Capital of another peace-loving continent, let me make an appeal on behalf of my people for Peace. Not as a political leader, but as a religious leader from among the people caught in the war and thirsting for Peace, in the name of a people held incommunicado for many years from the rest of the world, in the name of a people struggling to survive and resist a genocidal extinction - without sufficient food, medicine, transport, communication, in the name of the thousands of youth who have sacrificed their lives for a noble cause of freedom and dignity, truth and justice, in the name of future generations of all Sri Lankans, I appeal both to the Sri Lankan Government as well as to the de facto leadership of the Tamils. I also appeal to all the other political parties in Sri Lanka - be they Sinhala or Tamil -

- 1) not to play politics with the lives of a people
- 2) to halt immediately this senseless "war for peace"
- 3) to lift the economic ban to the North
- 4) to lift all media-censorship and allow journalists and other interested people to visit the war-torn areas and to be open to the truth of historical and contextual realities
- 5) to create military conditions conducive to peace-talks
- 6) to return as soon as possible to the negotiating table

- 7) to invite the assistance of some neutral but friendly governments or governmental organizations to help in the peace-talks.

I am standing here as a man of God in service to a suffering mankind. I have hope in the goodness of God and of men. From amidst the deafening sounds of thousands of bombs and shells falling on our soil and consuming sacred lives, I cry out with Moses of old, "Let my people go from this slavery to freedom"

**It is the Sinhala chauvinists,
who had taken away
the rights of the Tamils,
who had denied any just solution
to the Tamil problem,
who had militarily suppressed
all democratic attempts
to form a separate state.
It is they who are opposed
to Peace and not we Tamils.
-LTTE-Leader, 27.11.1997**

**In Britain
the Scots decide for themselves,
In Sri Lanka
the Sinhalese decide for the Tamils
-Tamil Guardian, 25.10.1997**

4

TRUTH WILL MAKE US FREE

*An International Conference on the Right of Self-determination of the Tamils organized by the International Federation of Tamils and held on Sept. 26 - 27, 1996
at Ealing Common Hall, London*

1. A Witness to Truth that frees

As a responsible Catholic priest of the Church of Sri Lanka, as one who has studied and worked with Sinhalese friends for many years, and now as one of the many Tamil victims, carrying the burden of a totally destructive war and a series of inhuman blockades against human life in the war zones, especially during the last ten years of my life, I can only bear witness to the truth of the tragic events taking place in the North of Sri Lanka and to the agonizing cries of those still struggling for survival. Such a

witness is important, especially in the context of the present war and the adjacent restrictions to life in the North taking place behind doors closed to all media from around the world. My witness here is in service to Truth, and is not intended to hurt anyone, not even the Government of Sri Lanka - but truly and sincerely, in favour of justice and peace to all the people of Sri Lanka. I firmly believe as a Christian that Truth does no harm but only liberates.

2. May our Religious Leaders become Peace-makers

I believe that for survival as a multi-ethnic and multi religious people in peaceful coexistence in one country, we must not allow our ethnic feelings to overtake our religious message of love, justice, peace etc. That does not mean that we should in any way hide our ethnic identity with any fear or minority-complex and behave or speak as if we were universal beings without the cultural dimensions of our birth . We should gratefully acknowledge the God-given heritage in birth, namely, land, language, culture, philosophy etc. and be loyal to them, just as we are grateful and loyal to our God-given faith. In life it is very essential to harmonize the ethnic and religious identities and hold the noble values of our religions as the light and strength of our unity with others.

...but amidst the noise of shells, helicopter firings and aerial bombings, we are fast loosing sight of values like truth, justice and respect for life. And time is running out.

It was in this sense that Pope John Paul II during his visit to Sri Lanka in January 1995 exhorted all the people of the land to use their religious potential to work for peace and unity. All the four religions of Sri Lanka have enough of that potential for peace and unity, but unfortunately they have not been used at all for that purpose. On the contrary, the religious leaders called to do that have at times misused their religious authority against peace and unity and encouraged war and destruction. I wish that the religious leaders of our country, more than ever before, use the potential of their religious values to foster true peace and unity in the country rather than encourage a narrow nationalism for the Sinhalese and a military solution to

the Tamil problem. We religious leaders are called not only to preach the noble values of our faiths but also to exercise prophetic courage and self-sacrifice in standing up for the noble values of truth, justice and peace.

3. Stating the Tamil Consensus

Secondly, as an observer and student of the recent events in Sri Lanka, I want to summarize the growing consensus and convictions achieved among the Tamils as a result of their long struggle. After forty years of struggle, filled with nothing but death and destruction, discrimination and displacements, there are still people in Sri Lanka who unfortunately try to solve the problem by saying, that there is no ethnic problem, but only a terrorist problem. We cannot afford to dialogue with such people. But overlooking such an intransigent minority, we think the vast majority in the country accept that there is a serious problem and are still willing to settle it. It is only with such we can dialogue. A fervent appeal to them may help solve the conflict.

4. A fervent appeal to help realize Peace

Hence on the basis of my witness to truth and on the basis of the growing Tamil consensus I share with the suffering people, I make a fervent appeal to all reasonable and peace loving people of Sri Lanka and of the international community, to help end this senseless war and the throttling of Tamil-life in this country and help those in power to find a peaceful solution.

5.0 The Tragic Situation in the Country Today

5.1 Sri Lankan “War for Peace” is self-contradictory and counter productive

A “war for peace” cannot be justified by any sensible person with any stretch of imagination about its goal. All the same, it is claimed as one conducted with the blessings of the majority religion

and with the aid of some friendly governments. Further the way in which this war is conducted, namely, behind closed doors, and the manner in which even denials of food, medicine and shelter to the surviving people are used as weapons of war makes one wonder whether the Government has any intention about a peaceful solution to the problem. It is leading many of us to think that the Government's solution of the ethnic problem sadly moves in the direction of an ethnic cleansing of the Tamil people!

The inability of the successive Governments to understand and solve the Tamil problem politically within the framework of parliamentary democracy has led the Government to resort to means beyond our human understanding, even to resort to the use of inhuman measures like the denial of basic amenities of life to people and hold them to subjugation, if not to ransom.

5.2 We are heading into a Blind Alley

We do not for a moment doubt the goodness and sincerity of our people - be they Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim or any other. As people to people, they retain their human dignity in the midst of their suffering and wish for each other a peaceful existence in the land of their birth. It is the power hungry politicians of the land, not excluding some religious leaders soaked in a false nationalism, and the unscrupulous and profit-oriented media who are leading the people and the country into a blind alley, if not into a valley of death.

5.3 Let us return to our senses

God has endowed us with a beautiful island, blessed with sufficient resources and a variety of cultures and religions to live happily and peacefully, but we men have made it into an island flowing with blood and tears. Only a return to our senses, a return to the fundamental values of human dignity and to the basic tenets of our faiths, can help us change course and move towards true justice and peace. Too much chauvinism, and a false nationalism proclaimed by political leaders and sustained by religious

fanaticism have overtaken our human and religious convictions and ruined the country. At least now, let us return to our senses.

5.4 Let's cry halt to all genocidal moves

We do not dare to challenge the authority of a Government elected by the people. But when the Government, professing to act in the name of those who elected it, probably in its ambition for power, dares to take such measures as to deny the basic necessities of life to its own citizens, prosecute a "War for Peace" causing death, destruction and many thousands to flee from their own houses, property and land, and irreparably rape and trample over, if not destroy, a whole land with its historic monuments, cultural treasures, even war-memorials and resourceful trees of the North - the very realities that make up the homeland of a people and held sacred by them - and even subjugate a people by military occupation of their land, then in such a situation, come what may, all sensible and peace-loving citizens, not merely of Sri Lanka, but also of the world, have to cry halt to such genocidal actions.

The clear signs are that the Government in its desperate efforts to by pass both the growing Tamil consensus and the de facto leadership of the LTTE that articulates those demands, is attempting all sorts of non-viable, if not ridiculous, solutions with the help of their non-representative supporters or stooges. If the Government proceeds further along this road, it will realize an ethnic cleansing of the Tamils of Sri Lanka and also hasten and escalate a permanent hate between the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka and the millions of Tamils also in the neighborhood. And worse still the prospects of growth for a Sinhala nation will be hindered.

In short, the present militaristic course of a war for peace will lead slowly but surely to a national suicide. Hence this call at the eleventh hour to all right thinking Sri Lankans - both Sinhalese and Tamils - to use all their wisdom and influence to effect a change in course from a militaristic approach to a peace-process.

6.0 Some Basic understanding needed for any meaningful solution

6.1 Just as the Sinhalese have lived long enough in Sri Lanka to claim themselves quite rightfully to be a nation, so do the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka claim to be a nation not merely on the basis of their history as a Tamil Kingdom and as a people with a distinct history and culture, but also as a consequence of their post-colonial situation vis a vis the majority Sinhalese and more so by the last forty years of death and destruction suffered in the hands of the Government. There was a time and a chance given soon after the gaining of Independence, to build a united nation out of all the races living in this country. But the Tamils have been strongly discriminated and all their democratic protests have brought nothing, except more and more military oppression. The reign of a state terrorism against the Tamils has been acknowledged by no less a person than the President herself. But paradoxically it is continued and even escalated.

The loss of thousands of innocent lives, destruction of Tamil property, land and resources by the Sri Lanka Government have amply demonstrated the will of the majority Sinhala Government to subjugate the Tamils and impose their "unjust peace" on the Tamils. This history of death, destruction and suffering has strengthened the will of the Tamils to be a nation, at least in the sense of a distinct people with the right of self determination.

Those who presume Sri Lanka to be one nation-state consisting of Sinhalese and Tamils, have in mind only an administrative-unity of the country left behind by the colonial British. On this basis they presume the subservient, namely, master-servant or Lord-tenant unity or even a parasite-unity as expressed by the former President Dingiri Banda Wijesinghe.

Unity of the country is not threatened by two nations living as peaceful neighbours but only by two nations living as

master and slave or on the throat of one another. There was a time when a peaceful unity could have been built and strengthened on a federal form of Government. But the opposition shown by the majority to share power on a federal basis has caused immense loss of life and property and escalated racial hatred, that only a union based on maximum autonomy to the regions can save the unity of the country.

6.2 The Future of the Tamils cannot be determined by the majority Sinhalese Government.

It is not surprising but a welcome sign that the majority Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, soon after Independence feel themselves as sons and daughters of the soil and as those mainly responsible for the building up of a new nation and for the renovation of their religion. The Buddhist monks understandably were in the leadership among the people to motivate them towards a genuine Sinhala Nationalism and also to restore Buddhism to its rightful place in the island. But all these aspirations however good and noble they may be, cannot be at the cost of others in the land. Efforts must be made without overstepping the basic rights of others, namely, the ethnic and religious minorities of Sri Lanka. The Tamils have lived in Sri Lanka for more than two thousand years. To handle them as second class citizens or late-comers and only tenants of the land is naked injustice.

6.3 Handling the Tamil Struggle as mere Terrorism is a blank refusal to accept the historic truth of the Tamil struggle for four decades.

The Tamil struggle for their basic rights has been going on for more than four decades. While the major political parties of the South overlooked the just demands of the Tamils and the successive Sinhala majority Governments failed to find a political solution but escalated only a military oppression, the democratic struggle of the Tamils changed face into a militant one against the military oppression of the Government. An escalation of military oppression and massive destruction of Tamil life and property by

aerial bombings and artillery shelling and using even denial of basic facilities for life as pressures to subjugate the Tamils have escalated the attacks of the LTTE.

6.4 The long and wide ranging economic blockade to the North under the pretext of some security measure, and using it as a weapon to subjugate a people is a direct violation of the collective human rights of the Tamils.

This is an open violation of the collective human rights of the Tamil people as stated in article 2 and 11 of the Human Right Convention of the UNO in its 1966 Declaration. While proudly proclaiming to the world that they are the only government in the world to send food to "the enemy camp", the Sri Lankan Government is enforcing a totally inhuman economic embargo on the Tamils of the North for the last six years, thereby attempting to weaken the people to their knees. Labeling nearly 50,000 people who crossed the Kilali lagoon around 19th. April 1995 to escape the *Riviresa III* attack as supporters of the LTTE and denying basic relief measures to them is a clear example of using food as a weapon of war.

Though the Government before the international world agrees to allow international NGOs to be present in the war zone and to give assistance to the victims of war, it restricts very much their freedom of movement by the imposition of indefinite curfew and by the denial of their basic requirements and through the detaining of their convoys for weeks at check points.. The situation of the NGOs in the North was so meaningless and embarrassing on the 25th. of July 1996, that they were the first to move out of the war zone when the Government declared curfew and the state forces started their attack on Kilinochchi.

6.5 Overlooking the obligations to The Human Rights Declaration of 1996 relating to socio-economical and cultural rights leads Sri Lanka to further ethnic strife.

Human rights activists and their organizations as well as the western governments have their way of seeing human right and their violations through their own experiences and histories. Soon after the tragic events of the Second World War and with the formation of the United Nations, there was the consensus found over the Declaration of Human Rights. Many watch-dog organizations in the world over and many democratic governments monitor the violation of human rights to the best of their abilities as seen through the articles of the declarations. They do an excellent job and their cumulative contribution is a guarantee of basic human rights and values.

But the experiences of many of the third world countries with respect to the values and rights of the ethnic, cultural and religious groups as well as the structures meant to guard and implement those values and rights are not taken into due considerations by the western powers. Although the 1966 Convention covered further areas after two more decades of post-war experience, and many countries including Sri Lanka, were signatories to it, many of the violations with regard to ethnic and cultural rights are overlooked and never condemned.

In 1982 when the Public Library of Jaffna, a great cultural heritage for all the Tamils of Sri Lanka was burnt down by the Sinhala Police forces stationed in Jaffna, no government lifted a finger in protest. And subsequently in 1996 when historic monuments in Jaffna are destroyed and war cemeteries in Kopay and Kodikamam in honour of the heroes fallen in war are ploughed by the Sinhala Forces of occupation using tractors, when the buildings of a whole city and the palmyrah and coconut trees of the peninsula are destroyed with a hatred, no governments condemn these barbaric acts.

When a bomb bursts and many people are killed, we justly abhor and condemn such acts as of terrorism. When the freedom or the rights of an individual is violated by the State Forces or the LTTE there too we rightly denounce the violation of human rights. But when thousands of innocent civilians face death and destruction through inhuman blockade of the basic necessities of life and subject to indiscriminate bombing and

shelling for months and years, no protest from any country is heard. No one condemns it as State-terrorism.

Unless the 29 articles of the Human Rights Declaration of 1948 are taken in conjunction with those of the 1966 convention, and equal importance and vigilance given to it, smaller ethnic communities living all over the world and struggling for their rights will be crushed by the larger communities. There will be always the powerful that will crush the weak, and the majority that will trample on the minority just as already the rich and powerful nations of the world determine the future survival of the weak and the poor.

Hence our appeal to the nations of the United Nations to go beyond the protection of individual rights to those of the collective rights of peoples to survive as a people.

7.0 Towards a Peace Process: Creating A Conducive Atmosphere is Fundamental for Talks

7.1 Withdrawing the military forces from Jaffna

The demand by the LTTE to withdraw the armed forces from the recently occupied territories of the Peninsula, (not from Palaly or from around the Peninsula) is not in any way comparable to the Government's demand for the laying down of arms. The taking up of arms on the Tamil side is only a later phase of the long Tamil-struggle, and it was in response to the military oppression of the Tamils by the State Forces. As long as the State Forces continue to oppress and seek subjugation of the Tamils, there is no valid reason in demanding the LTTE to lay down their arms.

The military occupation of the Jaffna Peninsula, though under the pretext of "liberating the people from the clutches of the LTTE", but done with an imperialistic ceremony of flag-hoisting in Jaffna and "handing over" ceremony in Colombo with victory-crackers, enforcing an inhuman economic blockade against the Tamils for such a long time, denying relief to the

“supporters of the LTTE” and worse still, keeping the North closed to all means of knowing the truth by not allowing journalists - all these are not at all conducive to bilateral talks between the Government and the LTTE. Changing these are not to be considered as concessions or conditions for talks. They are the necessary changes needed to create the right atmosphere for people to sit together and dialogue.

7.2 Talk possible only on the basis of mutual respect

While we recognize and respect the democratically elected Sri Lankan governments and the people they represent, including the present one and its people, yet we cannot but with nostalgic sadness, recall to mind the series of anti-Tamil discriminations, the tragic events such as military oppression of all non-violent and democratic protests by the Tamil members of Parliament and the series of unbridled anti-Tamil riots. All these happened in the name of and under Sri Lankan democracy. We have learnt by experience that while a militant may be forced to carry a gun and cause the death of a few, a democratically elected President can by his decision cause the burning and deaths of thousands. The former is understandable, while the latter is unforgiveable. It was the democracy of 1977, that prompted the then President, enjoying only a 52% support of the population to reject and even ridicule the almost unanimous aspirations of the Tamil people expressed through their elected representatives in favour of a regional autonomy for the Tamils.

Hence we value and even aspire parliamentary democracy but avoid absolutising it as the one perfect form of government in the world, dispensing justice and democracy for all people and situations. Situations and events can force us into alternative forms of leadership, at least for a limited phase and for a definitive purpose.

The second phase of the Tamil struggle is understandably characterized by a militant leadership in defense of the Tamil people and against the Sri Lankan Forces that oppresses them. Hence this leadership that emerged during the struggle must be recognized and handled with due respect and equality as a de

facto leadership. To think of only one side as true leaders elected by the election and to look down on others as mere megalomaniacs and "terrorists" will not help.

7.3 Third Party Mediation is indispensable to overcome mutual mistrust

The need to involve or invite a third party to help facilitate talks between the Government and the LTTE, does not arise out of a devaluation of the elected representatives of the majority of the Government. Nor is it based on a wish to internationalize the internal conflict and gain political mileage over the government. **We are convinced all along that it is an internal conflict which has to be settled among us and between us by means of meaningful talks between the parties in conflict.** The need arises out of our common experience in the past with regard to bilateral talks and pacts and the growing mistrusts between the parties in conflict.

We all accept that pacts signed and agreed between the Government and the Tamil leaders have been unilaterally torn off by the Government on more than one occasion. We also know that the last round of talks between the Government and the LTTE ended with a withdrawal by the LTTE from the Talks. And there has been mounting accusation on the part of the Government, and as a consequence by some friendly nations too, that the last round of talks were broken off abruptly, unilaterally and without sufficient reason by the LTTE. Though there were reasons and time frame given by the LTTE for the eventual break-down of talks, and the weakness of the Government with regard to the handling of the Talks pointed out by many Sinhala politicians, yet the mistrust has grown between the two parties in conflict. The level of mistrust we believe can only be overcome by the presence of a third party acceptable to both sides.

7.4 Rejection of any third party Mediation

The refusal by the Government to allow a third-party mediation on the grounds of it being an interference in the internal affairs of the country cannot be easily sustained. Although the proposal

to resume talks with the help of a third party mediation and some conducive atmosphere has been stated from the Tamil side, yet the Government appears either to be deafened by the cries of extremists and chauvinists to escalate the war or to lay down conditions which go beyond the resolution of the conflict, namely, the laying down of arms. There is no sign of any good will to turn course towards a peaceful negotiation.

8. Conclusions

I fervently appeal in the name of the thousands who have fallen victims of this war and in the name of people still surviving the war, to all the expatriate Tamils the world over, to realize the seriousness of the present situation, to overcome their petty differences and personal grudges, to close ranks towards a consensus approach and become active promoters of the just cause of the Tamils. Without any anger against any of our countrymen or government, we can sponsor the cause of justice and peace as articulated by this consensus.

Let us not deepen the wounds of division caused by such escalating military attacks and economic blockades against Tamil life in Sri Lanka. A solution, even if it be a political one, agreed by a democratic consensus of the majority, when imposed on a bleeding and imprisoned people against their wish and will is no solution. Short-sighted and foolish attempts at subjugating people through army occupation, economic blockade, forced settlements, politically motivated inter-marriages, etc. are not the ways of civilized leadership towards a solution.

We are caught in the midst of an escalating war and a spiral of violence initiated by the State Forces undeniably in the fifties. Left to themselves, they will consume all of us as victims. It is the hour of statesmanship to cry halt to both violence and war and open the doors for peace-talks.

**Truth will make us free!
Only Justice will bring forth Peace!**

5

IF YOU WANT PEACE WORK FOR JUSTICE

*An Address at the Annual Dinner organized by the
New York Tamil Sangam, on Nov. 9, 1996,
at the Akbar Hotel, in New Jersey, USA*

1. Today's Guests of Honour!

I thank the Tamil Sangam for having invited me to be the Chief Guest at this Annual Dinner 1996. I am sure your invitation went out, not just to an individual, but to someone representing or standing up for something worthy and dear to your heart, namely, the Tamils who are caught up in the war. I had the chance of accompanying those helpless and homeless people - facing the agonies of death and destruction caused by bombs and shells, facing starvation caused by the inhuman economic embargo, above all, facing injustices and misunderstandings locally and

internationally, caused by the blockade of all truths concerning their situation. I stand here before you in the name of those voiceless people there and as a victim and a witness to the horrible incidents during the past few months.

Hence in honouring me as a guest here for this annual gathering, you are honoring and expressing solidarity with the people who have already sacrificed their lives in the war or are still surviving as the displaced and the destitute in Thamil Eelam. I would humbly request you to stand up and observe a minute's silence as a mark of respect for the fallen and a sign of solidarity with the suffering and surviving.

2. To you, with a mission

This is my first visit to the US. In 1984 at the end of my Sabbatical assignment at the University of Muenster in Germany, I had the intention of visiting this country for the first time. I had then made my travel arrangements and looked forward to an enjoyable visit to this great country. But the turn of tragic events at home was so depressing that I called off my trip and returned immediately to Sri Lanka. In taking this decision, I was then reminded of what a German Pastor Dietrich Boenhoeffer wrote to a friend during the Hitler Regime, namely, unless one shares in the suffering that Germany was going through, one is not rightfully entitled to share in the joys of the new Germany to come.

Today the situation in Sri Lanka is much worse than it was in 1984. Still I have come from that war-zone to meet you all in this great city of New York on a mission - to speak to you, my sisters and brothers, on behalf of our sisters and brothers, some already dead under tragic circumstances of the war, and on behalf of those still surviving the agonies of death, destruction, economic embargo and displacements and are still trekking their way with hope on the road to liberation.

In fulfilling my role here on behalf of my immediate people, I am neither forgetful nor distant from the aspirations of the larger majority the Sinhalese and the Buddhists of Sri Lanka. I

wish to state categorically that we Tamils will succeed in our aspirations for freedom and liberation only to the extent that we wish the others in our country - the Sinhalese, the Buddhists, the Muslims and the Christians - their aspirations to be free and to grow as a people and a nation.

The recent events in our country point to so much of disaster and ruin, not only for the Tamils, but also for the others, that we all - Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians - should feel the dangerous course of national suicide we are heading for and urgently change course.

To refresh your mind, I would like to mention briefly the various stages through which the Tamil Struggle has gone through during the last four decades, then to highlight the turning point that we have now reached and to look ahead along with you, to the future

3. Reviewing the Past Steps of the Tamil Struggle

3.1 Waves of Anti-Tamil Riots

The forty year old struggle of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka has reached a new and definitive stage in its history. For over twenty years from the dawn of Independence from the British, there was the resurgence of a post-independence Nationalism that was largely pro-Sinhala-Buddhist and anti-Tamil. Faced with a series of anti-Tamil discriminations and violations of human rights, the Tamil political leaders sought constitutional protection within the frames of a united and democratic Ceylon and fought for the basic human rights of the Tamils remaining well within the democratic parliamentary system. But unfortunately the fervor and fanaticism of an ill-guided section of the majority paid scant respect to the aspirations of the Tamils democratic and non-violent protests and responded with waves of thuggery and military-violence, causing much death and destruction of Tamil lives and property.

3.2 Tamil-Leaders Either Deceived or Bought Over

Parallel to these violence against the Tamils, the majority Government largely succeeded in buying over the support, of Tamil politicians who either valued their position, prestige and power above the larger interests of the Tamil community, or were deceived by the promises of the majority through Pacts which were unilaterally torn off by the Sri Lankan Governments. Among those deceived were many social and religious leaders, intellectuals and professionals too.

3.3 Tamils vote for Thamil Eelam

Faced with growing discriminations in the field of education and employment, death and destruction by repeated anti-Tamil riots,



state-aided colonization of Tamil areas with Sinhalese with the sinister motive of reducing Tamil representation in Parliament, etc. - the Tamils moved towards a consensus which was democratically and forcibly expressed in the Vaddukoddai Resolutions of

1976 and approved by an overwhelming Tamil population (over 75%) at the last Parliamentary Elections of 1977. It was a clear and democratic mandate to establish Thamil Eelam whereby the Tamils of Sri Lanka will be recognized as a distinct people and a nation with their own history, culture and land having the power to determine their own future

3.4 The LTTE and the Tamil Demands

Although the next phase of the struggle took on a militant phase and the LTTE by their consistency in demands and by the sacrifice of so many lives, has come to stay as the de facto leadership of the Tamils of Northeast, the overwhelming consensus given by the Tamil people at the last parliamentary elections of 1977 has remained throughout as the basic demands of the Tamils. They were for the right of self-determination of a distinct Tamil people to administer their homeland as Thamil Eelam.

In spite of the tragic events like the holocaust of 1983 and the recent events in the North, the de facto leadership has expressed its readiness to consider an alternative for Thamil Eelam in the form of regional autonomy, but to date there has been no such concrete proposals of regional autonomy on the table nor an invitation to the de facto leadership to consider such proposals. Instead the Government is trying to label Tamil demands as only LTTE demands and to label the LTTE as a purely terrorist organization and is prosecuting a war against the Tamils. This will not in any way diminish the just nature of the basic demands of the Tamils nor lead us to any solution.

3.5 Chandrika's Peace-Talks

Coming to power on the promise of "Peace and no more war", the Chandrika Government did make an attempt to go for Peace-talks with the de facto leadership of the Tamils. But the cumulative effect of a weakly-composed peace-team from the Government, the reluctance of the Government to lift substantially the inhuman economic embargo against the Tamil people, and above all, the reluctance of the military to cooperate with the Government in

The Tamils entertained great hopes that the Chandrika government will stop the war and talk peace, but they are disappointed. The Tamils have never been so throttled, humiliated and suspected as during this present period.

implementing even the few gazetted decisions of the Government - all these forced the de facto leadership to give a month's notice to the Government and to go away from the negotiations.

In the light of what actually transpired between the Government and the LTTE, during the talks and witnessed by us, the Government's much publicized claim that the peace-talks were unilaterally and irresponsibly broken off by the LTTE cannot be accepted.

4.0 The Present Stage of the Struggle

The present stage of the Tamil struggle could be characterized by just three situations on the ground.

4.1. Military Occupation of Jaffna and Kilinochchi

The historic exodus of 500,000 people out of Jaffna, the capture of an empty-Jaffna, the hoisting of the Lion Flag over it, the ceremony and celebration in Colombo smacking of a 20th-century Sinhala imperialism and the subsequent military operations along Kilali lagoon to "suck in" a displaced and helpless population in exile in Thenmaradchi and Vadamaradchi into Jaffna are all a humiliating blow to the self-respect of all Tamils in the world. The earlier 1981 burning-down of the Jaffna Public Library by the Sri Lankan Police added to the present military hold-up of the Peninsula with all forms of restrictions including a daily curfew, destruction of all historic monuments and war-cemeteries, the cutting down of trees by their thousands - all these add up to a shameful rape of Jaffna, not to mention the hundreds of rapes done by the forces on innocent individuals like Kryshanthie and her mother just a few weeks ago.

The second exodus of over 250,000 people out of Kilinochchi into the jungles of Wanni during the last week of July 1996 was made still more pathetic by the absence of all NGOs due to Government restrictions on their movement and material.

All these make the year 1995-1996 go down in the history of the Tamils, as the year in which almost a million Tamils from the Jaffna Peninsula and Wanni were either displaced in all directions by the aerial bombing and artillery shelling of the Sri Lankan Army or held in captivity by the Sri Lankan Forces.

4.2. Economic Embargo

For more than five years, the Sri Lankan Government has restricted the flow of food, medicine and other basic facilities of life - power, communication, transport, stationary, confectionery, milk-foods etc.- and causing thereby a slow death of a population. This violation of the collective rights of a people has been imposed by the Government on its own people without any justification and the world outside with numerous organizations for human rights appears to connive with this injustice by their silence.

4.3. Media Blockade

Although the six-month old press-censorship in Colombo has been at last lifted, yet the horror of conducting a criminal war behind closed doors cannot be exaggerated. Just at the time when the war is escalated by aerial bombings, artillery shelling and all forms of blockade on movement, food, medicine etc. and the people are running about the jungles in desperation for survival, the southern part of the country as well as the world outside are kept in the dark by the prevention of local and foreign journalists into the North! If this is not a crime behind closed-doors, then what is it?

Governments and institutions which consider the indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling as well as the inhuman economic blockades against the Northeast as internal matters of the Sri Lankan state and refrain from condemning them as inhuman methods of subjugation of a people lose their right to condemn all alleged incidents of violence by the LTTE. These governments and institutions must use their good influence to improve the conduct of the Sri Lankan Government with re-

spect to the Tamils or seriously review their own relationship with the Sri Lankan Government.

5.0 Three Comments on the Government's Agenda

I like to make just three simple comments on the present agenda of the Government.

5.1. Indiscriminate Aerial Bombing and Artillery Shelling of Tamil areas and enforcing of an inhuman Economic Blockade against the Tamils cannot be justified as a War for Peace and as combating Terrorism.

Labelling the series of military operations after the 19th. of April 1995 - namely, Operation Leap Forward, Shake Hands, Lightning and Thunder, *Riviresa I, II & III* - under the general title of a War for Peace is nothing but a shameful attempt by the Government, that came to power on the pledge of "no more war, only peace", to deceive the supporters as well as the world outside, in order to win financial support and weapons for the war against Tamils. And labelling the LTTE as a mere terrorist organization and justifying its military actions as purely against terrorism, is again an attempt to hide its own history of state terrorism and the anti-Tamil riots of 1956, 58, 77 and 83 for the purpose of getting finance and weapons. It is an attempt to reduce the long standing ethnic problem into a mere terrorist problem and to justify a military solution for it.

5.2. Destroying an existing de facto Tamil leadership is closing the door to Peace-negotiations

The last Parliamentary Elections in which all Tamils of the North and East participated was that of 1977. It was at this election that the Tamil people gave a resounding mandate to the Vaddukoddai Resolutions of 1976. It was thus the overwhelming decision of the Tamil people for a separate state of Thamil Eelam comprising of the North and East of Sri Lanka, where the Tamils could enjoy

sufficient political power and foster their own culture and development. This was in consonance with the collective Human Rights as enunciated by the Declarations of the UNO in 1948 as well as in 1966.

Though the de facto leadership has become a militant one, the mandate they carry is an approved mandate of the Tamil people. They are consistent in articulating the demands of the Tamil people, and it is impossible to buy them over with privileges of ministerial posts as was done by the previous governments. Hence an attempt to destroy the de facto leadership of the LTTE is to close the doors to any meaningful negotiations with the Tamils.

5.3. Imposing a Sinhala majority decision on a subjugated and an unwilling Tamil population is against all freedom and democracy

Entertaining hopes of imposing, the will of the majority Sinhalese Government on a leaderless Tamil people or on a people with puppet-leadership is against freedom and democracy and smacks of imperialism.

A political solution largely discussed and decided by the majority, without the participation of the larger sections of the Tamils, without the participation of the de facto leadership, is not at all acceptable. The Devolution package was publicized long after starting the "war for peace" in July 1995 and the LTTE leadership, as well as the people of Northeast were actively excluded from any debate of the package. The President and the Minister for Constitutional Affairs publicly announced that the package will not be sent to the LTTE. And by the time, the Package was put out on Aug.3rd, the Tamils were on their run into the jungles for survival. It was not the time nor the climate for political debate. Hence it is evident that the majority has the intention of discussing the plan among themselves and imposing it on the Tamils in their state of destitute and displacement.

6. Expatriates and Refugees

It is very unfortunate that almost half a million of the Tamils of Sri Lanka are living outside the country, either as long-standing expatriates or as recently arrived refugees. A wealth of professionals, intellectuals and in recent times as a consequence of the discriminatory and dangerous situation at home, an exodus of youth with their talents and skills are living outside their homeland.

In recent months, the Sri Lankan Government has been pushing the Governments of countries with large refugee and

Short-sighted and foolish attempts at subjugating people through army occupation, economic blockade, forced settlements, politically motivated inter-marriages, etc. are not the ways of civilized leadership towards a solution.

expatriate population, either to repatriate them or to condemn them as supporters of terrorist organizations or to curtail their activities and financial aid to the suffering and dying in Sri Lanka as

aid to terrorism. Let every country handle the expatriates and refugees in their countries, with its own laws and procedures. Instead of being overconcerned or peeping into the activities of the Tamil expatriates and refugees, let conditions be created at home for the return of at least some Tamils abroad.

My travel around these countries have shown me how under difficult conditions of climate, culture, language, conditions of work, etc. our people are living and still so deeply concerned about the situation of people caught up in the present war. They sustain themselves by means of a network of communications and associations and also help people at home by their financial contributions for charitable purposes.

7. Conclusion: An Appeal

During my visits I have made appeals to these expatriates and refugees in the name of all the brave people fallen victims to military operations as well as in the name of those courageously

surviving the war. My appeal has been to sink petty differences and to join hands in the name of the common Tamil mother, to show more concern for our struggle, to contribute your talents and services and help us achieve a life of self-respect and human dignity on the land of our birth.

I would go a step further and spell out an additional appeal to those in the States.

Though many of you are privileged sons and daughters of the same Tamil motherland, and have the same genuine concern about her future and the welfare of present and future children, yet there seems to be some misunderstandings hindering a strong collaboration among you here in service to the noble goals of the Tamil people.

Some of you may have left our shores as a result of suffering some form of discrimination or as victims of anti-Tamil riots and some others may have not. Some of you may have moved in here early for better prospects of life and work. But there are others who have moved into this country after suffering various forms of hardships and having witnessed directly some horrible violations of human rights. In other words, there is no one homogeneous flow of Tamil youth into this country from a stable and steady situation at home. Hence there exists some room for gaps in understanding and acceptance and this gap has adverse effects on the contribution we expect for the cause of the Tamils suffering in Sri Lanka.

I like to appeal on behalf of your motherland to understand and accept one another and pool your resources at the service of our liberation. Let the elders or the early settlers, not look down on their younger brothers and sisters, as from a step-mother. It's the same mother who educated you with her good schools and sent as the elder sons and daughters, that is now sending the younger ones too, but devoid of all earlier facilities and shine. Hence the younger ones coming with the scars of a war and the discriminations of a later age, may have a different perception of things and show enthusiasm and fervor in a manner different from those of the elder ones. Similarly I will like to tell the youth who came in recent times to look up to their elders

for advice, services and contributions. Our cause is a noble one of justice and peace. It cannot be let down for lack of collaboration among you or contribution from you.

You are living in a country, far away from Sri Lanka, but important in its role for stopping the war, for promoting justice and human rights and in pushing towards a solution. Much could be done by you all in propagating the truth of our situation, and in agitating for justice and peace in our country through the various delegations having their principle seat in New York. You have various talents that need to be coordinated and harnessed for our cause. I am sure you will do something in responding to this call at this hour of need.

Standing on the American soil and remembering the words of a great President John Kennedy of this country, let me conclude with the words, "Tamils of Sri Lanka! Ask not, what your country has done for you, but what you have done for your country".

Once again, I thank you for having me as your guest,
May God bless you and your families.

**When the Nazis arrested the communists,
I was silent,
because I was not a communist.
When the social-democrats were arrested
I was silent,
because I was not a social-democrat.
When I was to be arrested,
there was nobody else
to protest against my arrest.
-Martin Niemoeller**

6

STATEMENT TO THE UN ON MASS EXODUS AND DISPLACEMENT

*Oral submission to the 53rd. Sessions of the UN Commission
for Human Rights on April 4, 1997 in Geneva, Switzerland*

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for allowing me to make this intervention on an issue vital for the survival of my people - the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

The International Peace Bureau has long been disturbed by the persistence and gravity of the conflict in Sri Lanka, and is therefore pleased to be able to present the following first hand testimony of the suffering caused to displaced people in the North and East of my country.

I am the Vicar General of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, and as a victim of many tragic events during the past few years in my country. I come here to give testimony to the suffering, death and destruction experienced by my people. They are the direct result of the mass exodus and displacements caused by the violations of the rules of war by the Sri Lankan Government. By this testimony, I want to make a fervent and urgent appeal to this 53rd. UN Commission on Human Rights, to help us survive as a people with rights to life, security and freedom.

Since the Report (E/CN.4/1994/44/Add.1) of Mr. Francis Deng on Internally Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka to the 50th. UN Session on Human Rights in 1994, the situation has dramatically deteriorated. Besides the 50,000 civilians killed in this prolonged conflict and the massive destruction of properties in the North and East of my country, the inhuman exodus and displacements have increased.

FIRST MASS EXODUS OF OCTOBER '95

Along with half a million people, I was displaced from Jaffna on the night of the 30th. of October 1995. It was the worst that has happened in the whole history of the country and in the history of our people for the last 2000 years. We survived the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial conquests for nearly 450 years, but we fled the inhumane Sri Lankan Army.

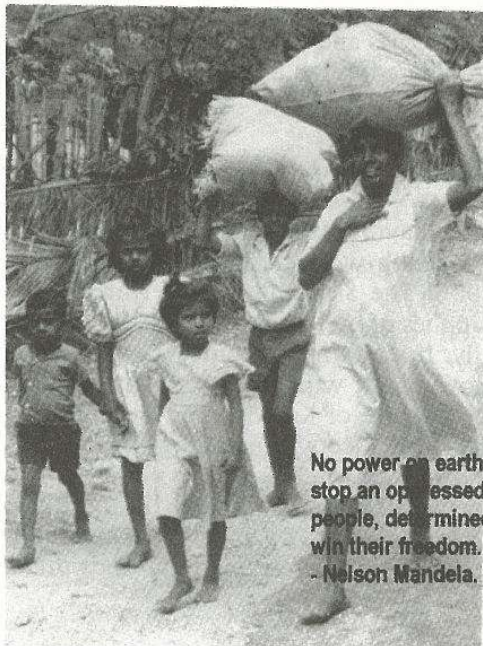
Having driven us to the margin of existence by a prolonged and inhuman economic blockade, the so called "war for peace" was launched against us by a series of military operations from the 7th. of July 1995. By each operation, thousands of people were uprooted from their homes and their livelihood.

On the 17th. of October 1995, a military operation called Riviresa was launched to capture the city of Jaffna. Day and night, they bombed and fired artillery shells. It thundered, shuddered and we all trembled and shivered. By the 30th. of October, we could not stand any more the thundering of the advancing army. We fled for our survival from our homeland, literally

threatened and chased by the bombs of an advancing Sri Lankan Army.

A population of half a million people, left their homeland under pouring rains with the barest minimum in their hands, often their crying babies, the sick and the old, to seek refuge in schools, churches and temples!

Even when Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali of the UN appealed for international assistance to relieve the human crisis created by the massive exodus, the Sri Lankan Government reacted adversely to the appeal, describing the exodus as a simple displacement within the country. Such was the love of the conqueror for the conquered. Though the NGOs did their best to fight famine and disease of all kinds, many succumbed to death between November of 1995 to April 1996.



No power on earth can
stop an oppressed
people, determined to
win their freedom.
- Nelson Mandela.

FORCING THE DISPLACED INTO THEIR “RAPED-CITY”

The Sri Lankan Army did a historic rape of the conquered city of Jaffna. They bombed more than 80% of the houses, as admitted later by Government representatives from Colombo, destroyed historic monuments, even that of an old King Sangilian of Jaffna, cut the coconut and palmyrah trees by their thousands and took revenge on their opponents by even bull-dozing their war-cemeteries.

In an effort to “suck back” the displaced back into this “conquered and raped city” of Jaffna, the Sri Lankan Forces started another military offensive on the 19th. of April 1996, bombing hundreds of boats on the Kilali lagoon and forcing the displaced to return into Jaffna. Today with daily curfew, a strong military presence oppressing free movement of people, with frequent rapes of girls and young women by soldiers, the Sri Lankan Army is literally a foreign army of occupation in my homeland.

SECOND EXODUS OF JULY ‘96 IN WANNI

After having lived in the Wanni jungles under severe conditions for health we were forced to flee again from the 26th. of July 1996. The Sri Lankan Government stopped even the minimum supplies of materials to the NGOs of the Wanni from the 18th. of July. It announced a curfew, whereby even the NGOs could not move about with their flags, and started bombing our areas for the capture of Kilinochchi. The NGOs moved out of the areas as their presence was meaningless and ineffective without materials and movement. The people were left like orphans to move out of that small town of Kilinochchi into the jungles. This time there were neither NGOs to help nor any buildings to take shelter. I am a witness to the starving thousands under the trees.

OPERATION EDIBALA

At a time when the people of Wanni were affected very badly by the economic blockade and hoping to harvest rice from their own fields, the Sri Lankan Army conducted in February 1997, their “Broad Front” operation called “Edibala”, and destroyed thousands of acres of paddy fields ready for harvest and sent almost 15,000 people into the Catholic sanctuary at Madhu.

EXODUS OUT OF SRI LANKA

I would like to draw your attention also to the massive exodus of Tamils fleeing away from Sri Lanka into many foreign countries.

As many as 800,000 thousand Tamils have fled away from their homeland. This displacement and dispersion of Tamils have taken place under tragic circumstances of losing lives, of selling all their possessions to get away from frightening situation at home, losing all their wealth to unscrupulous smugglers, losing relations and friends, courting imprisonment and humiliation in the hands of foreign governments, facing an alien world with an unsuitable climate etc.

OUR APPEAL

1) As long as this unjust “war for peace” which consumes 29% of the budget of the country continues, the displacements and suffering will continue and the whole country will soon face a national disaster, I appeal to this Commission to condemn this war unequivocally and to discourage all international for this war by way of personnel, finance and arms.

2) The suffering, death and destruction caused by mass exodus and displacements within the country are aggravated further by the inhuman economic blockade against the North and East, especially against those living outside the army-occupied areas. I appeal to this Commission to send immediately a fact-finding mission into the North and East of the country, and to take immediate measures to save the still surviving people from the slow-death they are facing.

3) As long as this war is conducted “behind closed doors” by not allowing local and international media into the war-zones, the truth about the gravity of the situation will be unknown to the world. I appeal to this Commission to send immediately a fact-finding mission into the entire North and East of the country and to act promptly on its recommendations.

4) Finally, I appeal through this Commission, to all the member states of the UN to impress upon the Government of Sri Lanka, to stop this war and with the help of the UN create conditions suitable for peace-talks.

7

TRUTH, JUSTICE AND PEACE FOR TAMILS IN SRI LANKA

This is the submission made to Pax Christi International for the 53rd. Sessions of the UN commission for Human Rights in Geneva in April 1997. This was also distributed as a hand-out at the Briefing for the NGOs during the 53rd Sessions

1. Only Truth can make us Free

I am presenting here an abridged version of the report I sent to "Pax Christi", an organisation that is committed to Truth, Justice and Peace as taught by Jesus Christ, and on behalf of my people - thousands of whom are already dead as victims of violence and war in the Northeast of Sri Lanka and the rest are battling for their survival in their own land as well as in foreign lands. As a victim and a witness of the ongoing war, and in solidarity with people crying out for justice and peace, my witness may be un-

comfortable to some, but I am convinced in the words of Jesus Christ "Only Truth can make us all free" Jn.8.32

2. From State-Violence to a Spiral of Violence and War

It is an undeniable fact, admitted even by the President, that the Tamils in Sri Lanka have experienced during the last forty years a military oppression that has later developed into a spiral of state and counter-state violence. All reasonable and democratic demands made by the Tamils through Parliamentary Procedures and non-violent protests from 1956 onwards for over two decades, were met with Sinhala mob-violence with the connivance of the Armed Forces or suppressed directly and violently by the Armed Forces stationed in the Tamil areas from the 50s.

The birth of Tamil militancy at the end of the 70s was caused by the congruence of many factors namely, the frequent Sinhala mob-violence with state-connivance against the Tamils, the armed-oppression of democratic and non-violent protests of Tamils and the recurring intransigence of the successive Governments in finding a reasonable solution to the Tamil problem. The cumulative effect of all these was to push the Tamil youths, partly in desperation about their future and partly in self-defence against continuing violence of the State, to take up arms against the armed Forces. This Tamil revolutionary-violence in opposition to the already existing "state-violence" makes up the present spiral of violence and war in my country.

3. "Democracy by the Majority" and the Tamil Option for Separation

The post-colonial parliamentary democracy left in the hands of a permanent majority Sinhalese has only served as "a blanket of democracy" to steal and suppress the rights of the non-Sinhalese. During the last five decades of democracy, the right of citizenship of many hundred thousands of Tamils of Indian origin were taken away by the stroke of a pen (1949), the rights of Sri Lankan Tamils with regard to their language, education and employment

were taken away (1956), all forms of Tamil protest were suppressed by military might (PTA), even the elected Tamil Members of Parliament were thrown out of the House (6th. Amendment) and finally a war is conducted "behind closed doors" and all forms of basic needs denied to a people.

The Tamils have come to loose faith in this particular "democracy by the majority" whereby the will of the majority-Sinhalese is imposed, even if totally detrimental and unjust, on the minorities. It was after suffering many decades of injustice, discrimination and violence, that the Tamils in the parliamentary elections of 1977, in which all the Tamils participated for the last time, gave an overwhelming support (over 75%) to separation. The Tamil cry for separation, was not an anti-Sinhala move, but a just demand and a cry for survival expressed through parliamentary elections for political space and freedom for the Tamils to exercise their fundamental right of self-determination. This demand of over 75% of Tamils was thrown out of Parliament without any consideration and even outlawed by the Sixth Amendment.

4. President Chandrika's Peace-Talks

The coming of President Chandrika with the promise "Peace, no more war", there was a rekindling of the hope for Peace, especially among the Tamils. The Peace Talks which started with gestures of good will from both sides, unfortunately ended after a brief period.

Against all Government propaganda and international reactions, it must be stated in all fairness that although the LTTE went away from the talks, it did so for valid reasons and gave due notice to the Government, almost six weeks before the actual break-down.

(It was clear that the weak composition of the Government-team for the talks, the reluctance of the Army to implement even the things agreed and gazetted with regard to the partial lifting of the economic blockade, the reluctance of the Government to open a military-free passage for the Tamil people to go to the South and

the anxiety of the Government to have political gains before relieving the burden of the people gave rise to suspicions and frustrations on the part of the LTTE. The Government was holding on to the economic blockade to the North as a weapon against the Tamils to win political gains and paid little heed to dangers threatening the Talks. This was proved to be true when the Government clamped down again a 100% economic blockade on the Tamils at the break-down of talks.)

Any future attempts at talks must pay attention to the danger of using economic blockade as a threat on the Tamils for political gains and insure a third party to help overcome lack of mutual confidence and frustrations.

5. The Government's Two Pronged Approach

After the break down of Pace-Talks, the Government proclaimed a two-pronged approach - a "War for Peace" to wipe out the LTTE and the "Devolution Package" to solve the problem..

5.1 War for Peace

This "War for Peace" contrary to all pious propaganda by the Government has caused maximum amount of death, destruction, displacement among the whole Tamil population. Between 7th July 1995 and 1st March 1997, not less than 15 major military offensives have been undertaken in the North alone. With already more than 50,000 civilians and 8,000 Tamil militants and an equal number of soldiers dead, these offensives backed by indiscriminate aerial bombing and shelling have reduced the 800,000 Tamil people still surviving to be either in the "open prisons" and "refugee-centres" of the military or to be displaced in the jungles of Wanni devoid of proper food, medicine and shelter.

A major achievement claimed by the Government has been the military occupation of Tamil areas. They have been marked with vast destruction. Even after two years of the so cal-

led liberation of the Jaffna Peninsula from the Tigers, no independent journalists are allowed into the area for knowing the objective truth. (The letters from reliable sources in Jaffna tell us of the various rapes in Jaffna. Besides the horrendous rape of young women committed by the armed forces, there are other forms of raping a city sacred to the Tamils. The Jaffna Public Library- a cultural heritage of the people- was burnt down by the Sri Lanka Police Forces in 1982. And now the occupied Forces have destroyed not only over 80% of the buildings of Jaffna, but also the historic monuments in public places. They have cut down the palmyrah and coconut trees in their thousands, and even bulldozed war-cemeteries of their opponents.) The destruction in the occupied areas will not serve to erase the aspirations deep in the hearts of a people, but only strengthen the memories and aspirations of those still surviving.

5.2 The Devolution Package

To the world outside the so called Political Package is presented as a crowning effort of the Government to solve democratically the ethnic problem. But what is the reality?

...Is this denial not a misuse of the basic necessities of life as a weapon of war to subjugate a people, to bend their collective political will and force them to their knees to accept the will of the government?

President and the Minister for Constitutional Affairs insisting that the package will not be sent to the LTTE, the de facto leadership of the Tamils, and

on the other side the Tamil people are forced to flee from bombs and shells into the jungles, the package becomes a non-event for the majority of Tamils. It is debated only by the majority Sinhalese in the South, while the Tamils are gasping for breath on the margins of death and destruction in jungles.

The double pronged of approach of debate in the south and war in the North, amounts to dangling a political package in the South and before the world, for political advantage and at the same time wielding the hard stick of war against the Tamils to

bring them on to their knees and to force a solution on them. Is this not again a military attempt, costing lives and 22% of the country's budget, to subjugate the Tamil people?. Is this not an attempt to destroy or weaken the existing de facto leadership and impose, the will of the Sinhala majority on the Tamil people as a whole.? It is again a democracy by the majority!

6. Violations of the Human Rights

It is undeniable there have been violations from both sides of the conflict but very often the gross violations committed by the guardians of the law and the state forces are glossed over and those of the Tigers who react to state violence are exaggerated.

6.1 The indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling on a population When a single bomb explodes in the south and innocent people die in it, we are all shocked and saddened. Loud and eloquent condemnations of violence are expressed by Governments and organisations the world over. In such a world, how is it possible, understandable and justifiable, that in the North and East of Sri Lanka, the Government Forces under the pretext of attacking terrorist bases, drop hundreds of bombs over civilian areas and engage in indiscriminate destruction of churches, temples, schools and kill hundreds of innocent civilians and school children? I am a direct witness to the 100% direct bombing on St.James' Church in Jaffna, to the six bombs dropped in the premises of Sts.Peter and Paul Church at Navaly, of the bombing of 29 school children at Nagarkovil, of the bombing at 4.00 am over the fishing village of Naachikudah in which 16 civilians were instantly killed and of many other.

6.2. The inhuman Economic Blockade against the Tamils is a slow but steady killer worse than bombs and shells. Denying to a people the basic requirements of sufficient food, medicine, shelter, communication, transport, etc. by enforcing a senseless economic blockade for many years is a gross violation and denial of the collective and basic rights of a people. Why is the world not condemning this violation for so many years and not do something to restore these basic facilities for life. **Can the**

world permit a Government to use an economic blockade on its citizens for years as a weapon of war to subjugate a people and bend their collective will?

6.3 Media Blockade makes the war to be a genocidal crime behind closed-doors It is also a serious violation of the right of the world outside the war zones to know the truth. A democracy that prosecutes a war on public funds and begging bowl, must have an accountability to tell the whole truth to its citizens and to the world. A President who is so sensitive to Press criticism and even takes journalists to court for criminal defamation, has no concern for the truth of events consuming thousands of lives.

All the recent reports given by Human Rights Organisations suffer the limitations of this blockade on journalists and foreigners. The reports have lost their degree of objectivity and credibility because they are forced to depend more on Government reports which are those of the Operational Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence in Colombo.

7. The Restrictions on the NGOs

Being in contact with the plight of various NGOs operative in the war zone, we appeal for better conditions for them. Denying those conditions are a violation of the right of a people dying in war and sickness to have humanitarian assistance. Without sufficient freedom of movement, equipment for communications, medicines and materials, they are ineffective and frustrated.

(Just one example: The Government Forces at Vavuniya-checkpoint stopped all vehicle movement to the North from the 18th. of July 1996. One week later, on the 25th. of July 1996, the Government declared curfew and prohibited any movement of vehicles, even those of the NGOs with their respective flags. On the 26th. the Forces started aerial bombing and artillery shelling over Kilinochchi district. The NGOs had already left the district on their vehicles and moved into Mallavi and Madhu on the 25th. and the people, who were left behind like orphans, faced

the aerial attacks and had nowhere to run to, except into the cover of trees. I witness to the thousands who were fleeing from Kilinochchi that night, with children in their hands crying for water and food. One week later I was present at a meeting of the representatives of all the NGOs at Madhu under the Government Agent of Mannar. The representatives unanimously admitted of their helplessness - without materials and freedom of movement.)

8. Our Conclusive Appeal

In Conclusion we appeal for Peace with Justice for all the peoples of Sri Lanka. I plead with this Assembly to do all that it can

- 1) to stop immediately **military operations** including indiscriminate bombing and shelling
- 2) to lift immediately the inhuman **economic blockade** on the Tamils and prevent the slow death of a people.
- 3) to lift the **media blockade** to the North and ensure free media access in service of truth
- 4) to initiate peace-talks between the parties in conflict with the help of a third party like the UNO or a group of foreign governments.
- 5) to ensure maximum freedom and facilities to the NGOs working in the war-zones

So long as the plight of new nations within a nation-state are left unattended and when democracies by majority given birth to problems and treat democratic protests of minorities with the military might of the state, when people suffer state-oppression and discrimination for long decades and have no platform to voice their protests against the violation of their collective human rights, they will turn their tears-filled eyes on to you, with a firm hope for survival. Please do not look into our problems and protests only through the categories of human rights established by the experience of western nations and enshrined in the post-war conventions, but in the name of God and in the name of people suffering and dying within one-nation states, especially in the third-world countries with their post-colonial experience and problems, please go beyond to understand their cries for survival and respond effectively.

8

A WITNESS TO THE SILENT TRAGEDY IN SRI LANKA

*An Address to the Meeting organised by the Midwest Tamil
Sangam on June 1, 1997 at Chicago, USA*

1. Introduction: A Witness in Service of Peace

I am standing here on behalf of my people - thousands of whom are already dead as victims of violence and war in the North and East of Sri Lanka and the rest are battling for their human dignity and survival, either as virtually imprisoned people under an army of occupation or lingering for survival somewhere in the jungles of the North and East, devoid of the basic necessities of food, medicine and shelter.

As a Tamil Catholic priest from Jaffna, I am giving witness to events which I personally experienced in Sri Lanka during the last forty years, especially in the North during the last ten years. As Vicar General of the Church in the North and as Rector of the Major Seminary in Jaffna, I had the privilege of being close to a suffering people in their agonies. My own academic community consisting of eight priests and sixty students of the Seminary, lived through a decade without sufficient food, transport, communication, no electricity, and worst of all, witnessing the hundreds killed even within churches and schools by aerial bombs and artillery shells of the Sri Lankan Forces. We finally moved out of Jaffna along with those 500,000 people chased out of their homes by an advancing army of occupation. Days after our exit from our birthplace, the Sri Lankan Army hoisted its Lion Flag over Jaffna and celebrated victory over a people. That was the historic exodus - an unforgettable event for all the Tamils of the world - at the end of October 1995.

We have learnt by experience that while a militant may be forced to carry a gun and cause the death of a few, a democratically elected President can by his/her decision cause the burning and deaths of thousands. The former is understandable, while the latter is unforgiveable.

After a brief survival in the jungles of Kilinochchi, we were chased out again from our humble huts in our homeland, by the threat of aerial bombs and artillery shells on the 25-26th. of July 1996. The journey on the 30th. of October 1995 from Jaffna to Mirusuvil and on the 20th. of Jan. 1996 from Mirusuvil through Kilaali Lagoon to Kilinochchi, and on the 26th. of July 1996 from Kilinochchi to Madhu was a hard and heart-breaking one that deprived us of most of our possessions and chased us away from our own soil.

As one who has served both the Sinhalese of the South and the Tamils of the North, I believe in the goodness and ability of the people to avoid an impending national disaster, save even the little that is left and rehabilitate themselves towards a new life of equal human dignity and peace for all the peoples of the

country. I firmly believe and I am convinced that we Tamils can achieve our aspirations only to the extent that we wish the same for the others. As Tamils, we wish well that the Sinhalese majority of our country grow as a great nation with their God-given social and cultural heritage, that Buddhism, as found in Sri Lanka, grow as a powerful beacon of Peace in the world, that Sri Lanka prosper economically and so on. But let this growth and prosperity of one nation or religion, how numerous they may be in the country, be not at the life-and-death expense of another nation and people.

2. Only Truth and Justice can give us Peace.

My witness may be uncomfortable to some, especially to those in power, but I am convinced as a Christian in the words of Jesus Christ **"Only Truth can make us all free"** Jn.8.32. and in the words of our present Pope John Paul II **"If we want Peace, we must work for Justice"** In spite of attempts from some quarters to silence me, I have to speak out my convictions for the benefit of all my countrymen - Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. If I do not witness to what my Tamil people are going through, and maintain a silence of convenience for reasons of personal security, then I betray the very people I chose to serve in the name of God. Hence in the name of God, my call is to everyone involved in the prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka, to face up to the truth of history and to the tragic realities of today, to be daring in changing their course of action and to be magnanimous in listening to one another and sincere in seeking a peaceful solution based on truth and justice to all.

3. Refusal on the part of our leaders to see realities will only lead to a national suicide

In recent times, our politicians and governments have become so greedy for power and position, intellectuals and religious leaders have become so emotional and fanatical, that they become blind to realities and loose their power of reasoning, they fail or refuse to reckon with the history and historical developments in the country. They try to hide the truth of events already within the

country, and attempt with a false propaganda to win aid and weapons for continuing the war, and keep off international pressure or even offers of mediation.

The media-blockade which the Sri Lankan Government is enforcing to conduct "the war for peace behind closed doors"; in preventing local and international journalists into the war-zones and dishing out only military reports tailored for political gain, within and without the country, the cold reaction of the Government to offers for mediation by several friendly countries - all these I think is part of a calculated and malicious move intended to give immunity for the crimes committed by those in power and by the Forces. The inflammatory calls of some religious leaders and university professors are shocking. They have neither seen the colour of the North and East of the country, nor the massive destruction therein nor have a mature understanding of world affairs, yet in their fanaticism and racism are calling on the Sinhala youth, not their own sons and daughters, "to go and die in defence of the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country". These are examples of an isolationist attitude and of an ostrich-vision, which can lead to a national suicide behind closed doors.

Hence I think the need of the hour for our leaders to be realistic and truthful with regard to history and the events, to be statesmanlike and sincere with regard to seeking a peaceful solution and to be just and courageous with regard to implementing even the few promises and agreements.

4. As Government escalates Discriminations and Military Oppression the Tamils move through suffering and death to cry out for Separation

During these four decades of ethnic strife in Sri Lanka, the Tamils have gone through a journey of untold sufferings,- death, destruction, and displacements, caused by the aerial bombing and artillery shelling, then starvation sickness and death caused by a prolonged and inhuman economic blockade and then murder, rape and humiliation caused by the undisciplined State Forces. The Tamils have learnt bitter lessons of history, they have moved

through sufferings to new convictions and consensus about their way to survive and they are bound to remain committed to these as points of no return.

It is true that the Sinhala people and their Government, have made certain efforts during the past few years, especially under the present President, to respond to the Tamil aspirations and demands. But they have been too little and too late and are being offered in the wrong way with a militaristic thrust that may end up as a successful operation resulting in the death of the patient. Forgetting the historical fact that it is their military oppressions against the non-violent Tamil protests that pushed the Tamils to a consensus for separation, the Sinhala Government is responding even now with an escalating war and destruction. I like to place before you further evidence of these approaches.

5. Getting out of the Spiral of Violence and War is a primary obligation of the Government who initiated it four decades ago

The Tamils in Sri Lanka have experienced during the last forty years a racial discrimination and a military oppression, that has later developed into a spiral of state and counter-state violence. All reasonable and democratic demands made by the Tamils through Parliamentary Procedures and non-violent protests from 1956 onwards, were either met with mob-violence from the majority Sinhalese, often with the connivance of the Armed Forces or suppressed directly, and often violently, by the Armed Forces stationed in the Tamil areas from the 1960s.

The intransigence of the successive Governments in not finding a reasonable solution to the Tamil problem, the armed-oppression of democratic and non-violent protests of the Tamil people, combined with recurring anti-Tamil mob-violence (often with the knowledge and even approval of some members of the Government) had the cumulative effect of pushing the Tamil youths, partly in desperation about their future and partly in self-defence against continuing violence of the State, to take up arms against the armed Forces. This Tamil revolutionary-violence in

opposition to the already existing “state-violence” have come to be the present spiral of violence and war in our country.

Having reached a position where a war against its own people and an economic strangulation cannot be justified, approved or supported by the civilised nations of the world, the Government goes to mask its effort with a self-contradictory title that the world can never think of, namely, “War for Peace”. It is a shameful attempt by a Government to quieten its own conscience and to use a deceptive-title to beg for weapons and aid from the powerful nations and their banks. Another deception attempted by the government is that in spite of killing more than 50000 Tamil civilians by the aerial bombing, artillery shelling and so on, it maintains that this war is not against the Tamils but only against the LTTE. A third deception and a more serious one, is the attempt by the Government to deny history, deny its own track record for the last four decades, and maliciously label the Tamil struggle for survival to be a free people as pure terrorism. Some of the western powers have conveniently swallowed this lie and justify their aid with weapons as their contribution to fight world terrorism!

Hence my conviction is that no peaceful solution can be achieved until all sides get out of this spiral of violence and war. And the first step to achieve this goal is to acknowledge the origin of this spiral, in the state-violence of the sixties and seventies, and the later development by reason of the Tamil revolutionary-violence to it into a spiral of violence and war. This has to be squarely and sincerely acknowledged by the Government. and the initial move has to be taken by the Government with a statesmanlike courage to get out of the spiral it gave birth to.

The Government’s hidden agenda to take the military offensive to a finish and then to impose their political solution on the still surviving Tamils, is nothing but a aiming at a shameful Sinhala imperialism or colonialism in the 21st century.

6. The Tamil Option for Separation is a cry for a peaceful living in one country

The post-colonial parliamentary democracy left in the hands of a permanent Sinhala-majority, has only served as a democratic cover to deny or suppress the rights of the non-Sinhalese. The Tamil demand for a federal form of Government to settle in the best democratic manner the multi-ethnic character of the country was misinterpreted as dividing the country. It was treated with much contempt and fury as if it was the demand of a tenant to his Landlord.

The Tamils have come to lose faith in this particular “democracy by the majority”, whereby the will of the majority-Sinhalese is imposed on the minority-Tamils by use of force. It

The State-media, which gave no pictorial publicity to the pathetic exodus of half a million people was now publishing coloured photographs of returning refugees. Where was this media when the people fled in fear and sought shelter on the roads and struggled for survival?

was after suffering many decades of injustice, discrimination and violence, that the Tamils in the Parliamentary Elections of 1977, in which all the Tamils participated for the last time, gave an overwhelming support to separation as the only means for survival. This demand of over 75% of Tamils for an honourable separation has been completely misunderstood by the Sin-

halese, violently opposed and even outlawed in Parliament by the Sixth Amendment.

The Tamil decision was in the interests of their own future as well as in the interest of peace and prosperity for the whole country. It is not an anti-Sinhala or racist decision, but a pragmatic decision with a realistic approach to live side by side as good neighbours and friends within one country rather than as enemies with mutual suspicions within a unitary-state as left behind by the colonial British..

This call for a separation, may be viewed as a return to our pre-colonial status as a distinct nation with a very long history of kings, kingdom, heritage and so on. But the strongest argument that strengthens and demonstrates the wisdom of this deci-

sion is the experience of the last forty years. We have been made to suffer as a people and forced to pay with our lives for being a people. Now we want to live as a people.

7. The Tamil Consensus

Decades of discrimination and suffering have made the Tamil people grow in their awareness of their history and of their rights as a people. This awareness has matured into a common consensus among the Tamils especially after 1976.

The Pogrom of July 1983 which was the climax of all anti-Tamil riots opened the eyes of all Tamil leaders still wider to arrive at a consensus about the basic aspirations and convictions of the Tamils. As a consequence at the Thimpu Talks of 1985 mediated by India, the call for separation was further spelt out in a slightly different language, as a Tamil Consensus and sealed by the various Tamil groups. It is another milestone in the Tamil journey of liberation. The recognition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a distinct nation, their inalienable right of self-determination, the preservation and development of their traditional homeland of the North and East and the right of equal dignity and citizenship for all the Tamils along with the Sinhalese - these will remain as the goal and foundation of the Tamil struggle.

8. The LTTE is only carrying forward the Tamil consensus of the 1977 parliamentary election and of the 1985 Thimpu

The Tamil demands are not an invention of the LTTE. They are the genuine aspirations of a people, crystallised by their long suffering of discrimination, death, destruction and displacements. They cannot be wiped away by military offensives nor exchanged for some political gains. The LTTE, as the de facto leadership of the Tamils, are consistent and determined to press forward with this consensus. Because this leadership cannot be coaxed to give up any of the Tamil demands and because they cannot be bought over like some other Tamil leaders of the past and present, the government wants to decimate or weaken this leadership, and

impose on a de facto leaderless people, of course with the help of some Tamil stooges, a Sinhala solution to the Tamil problem. This appears to be the hidden agenda of the present government.

With regard to the partial lifting of the economic blockade, the reluctance of the Government to open a military-free passage for the Tamil people to go to the South and the anxiety of the Government to have political gains before relieving the burden of the people - all these gave rise to suspicions and frustrations on the part of the LTTE. The Government was holding on to the economic blockade to the North as a weapon against the Tamils to win political gains and paid little heed to warnings about the dangers threatening the Talks. This was confirmed when the Government clamped down its 100% economic blockade on the Tamils on the very day the cessation of hostilities ended.

Many of the friendly countries of Sri Lanka who have already placed their hopes on Chandrika's peace effort, believed the Government's false propaganda about a unilateral breakdown of talks, and in their anger against the LTTE, quickly switched on to support her war-effort - cloaked as "war for peace". It is regrettable that responsible nations are guided by one-sided reports of the government and so quickly switch their support for a war.

9. The Government's Two Pronged Approach

After the break down of Pace-Talks, the Government proclaimed an apparently two-pronged approach but in substance it has turned out to be a military approach with a political cover. At first the "War for Peace" was launched in June 95, and later in August 95 when the offensive was well on its way, when the Tamils were running into the Wanni jungles for their survival, a "Devolution Package" was proposed, and that too, only to the South of the country.

10. War for Peace is the final stage of an operation seeking success but causing patient to die

Contrary to all propaganda by the Government that this "War for Peace" is not against the Tamils, but only against the Tigers, it has already caused enormous death, destruction, and displacement among the whole Tamil population.

Between 7th. July 1995 and 1st. of March 1997, not less than 15 major military offensives have been undertaken in the Northeast. With already more than 50,000 civilians and 8,000 Tamil militants and an equal number of soldiers dead, these have reduced the 800,000 still surviving Tamils to be either in the "open prisons" and "refugee-centres" of the military or to be displaced in the jungles of Wanni devoid of proper food, medicine and shelter.

Even after two years of the so called liberation of the Jaffna Peninsula by the Forces, no independent journalists are allowed into the area for finding the objective truth of events there. Recent letters from reliable sources in Jaffna tell us of the various rapes in Jaffna. Besides the horrendous rape on students and young women committed by the armed forces, there are other forms of raping going on against the Tamil region and its historic capital city Jaffna, almost sacred to the Tamils.

11. The Rape of the North

The rape of the Tamil homeland started already in 1982 when the Jaffna Public Library- a proud cultural heritage of the people- was burnt down by the Sri Lankan Police Forces. In and around Jaffna, the occupied Forces have destroyed not only over 80% of the buildings, but also nearly all the historic monuments in public places. For the purpose of putting up military camps in open space for reasons of security, and without any respect for the labours of the people, especially during the last few years through the LTTE's campaign for food-production, they have laid waste hundreds of acres of paddy fields ready for harvest and valuable vegetation that made up Jaffna to be what it was to the Tamils. The LTTE campaigned actively for the preservation of environment by encouraging the planting of trees, especially palmyrah and coconut trees and enforced a restriction on the cutting down of trees, but the Sri Lankan Forces have cut down palmyrah and

coconut trees in their thousands to put up camps all over the North and East. Without respect for the victims and warriors of war, they have even bull-dozed war-cemeteries of their opponents. This is nothing but the rape of the Tamil region and its capital city of Jaffna, expressing contempt and disregard for the people. This can neither be rebuilt nor rehabilitated by any amount of foreign money nor easily forgotten.

12. People Between the Bund and the Barbed Wire

Very recently with Operation Edibala to link up Vavuniya to Mannar, thousands of acres of paddy fields were destroyed and more than 14,000 people were displaced and made homeless. They swelled the already 20,000 refugees at Madhu. The present operation of *Jeya Sekuri* to link up Vavuniya to Jaffna is going to be the final phase to contain an entire population between the bund and the barbed wire. The 70 KM of the road between Vavuniya and Mannar is made a corridor between barbed wires on one side and the continuous bund on the other. The Jaffna - Vavuniya barbed-wire-bund, if materialised, will be still longer. One can imagine a whole northern territory criss-crossed with bund, barbed wire, daily curfews at nights and frequent check-points during the day. People surviving within areas not occupied by the army around Madhu are made to walk several miles to receive their rations of rice to survive.

13. The Devolution Package ~ From Hope to Despair

Although the Devolution Package is presented to the world as a sincere effort of the Government to solve democratically the ethnic problem, what is the reality on the ground? On one side there is the Government's continued insistence that the package will not be sent to the LTTE, and on the other side the very people for whom these proposals are claimed to be a solution are made to flee from bombs and shells into the jungles. In such a context, the package becomes a non-event for the Tamils. It has been debated much by the majority Sinhalese in the South, while the majority

of Tamils are gasping for breath on the margins of death and destruction in the jungles.

The double pronged approach proclaimed by the Government of a debate in the South and a war in the North, amounts to dangling a "political carrot" to the South and before the world, for political advantage and at the same time wielding the hard stick of war against the Tamils in the North in an attempt to bring them to their knees and to force a southern solution on those who survive the war.

While prosecuting this war spending 29% of the country's budget and sacrificing the lives of thousands, the Government appears to show more commitment to winning the war and subjugating the Tamil people than to political talks or to any mediation.

14. Violations of the Collective Human Rights of a People

Being convinced that the fate of my people remains to a great extent on the interest and concern shown by the International community, I wish to raise some pertinent questions that are vital for our survival. Why the prolonged and gross violations committed by the State and its guardians of the law against the collective rights of a people are glossed over in silence while the violations within a spiral of violence and war are made the subject of scrutiny and condemnations by the international community? Why are nations and states which fuel this war and violence with their weapons and funds, hypocritically condemning individual acts of human right violations and turn a blind eye to years of political imperialism and military oppression? Where are the guardians of democracy when an elected Government is bombing and shelling a whole population and starving them to bend their political will to force them to their knees, to make them accept only what they decree?

I want to mention these collective violations with a little more evidence to confront the conscience of the world..

15. Why is the world conniving with the indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling of a population?

As an eye witness of the direct bombing of St.James' Church in Jaffna, of the six bombs that fell in the premises of Sts. Peter and Paul Church at Naval, of the bombs that killed the little ones in the school at Nagarkovil, of the helicopter propelled rockets into the fishing village of Naachikudah - in all of these where many hundreds of innocent children, women and refugees were instantly killed, I dare to ask the whole world this question. How is it possible that peoples and nations cry out so loudly against a single bomb in the Colombo city or in any other part of the world, including the horror of Oklahoma, but do not condemn the Sri Lankan Government, when its Forces, under the pretext of attacking terrorist bases and under the cover of a strict media blockade, drop not one, but hundreds of bombs and fire thousands of artillery shells over civilian areas day and night, and cause indiscriminate destruction of churches, temples, schools and kill many hundreds of innocent civilians for so many years?

16. Why is the world silent at the prolonged and inhuman economic blockade enforced by a Government against its own people -the Tamils- as a weapon of war?

Denying to citizens of a country the basic requirements of sufficient food, medicine, shelter, communication, transport, etc. by enforcing a senseless economic blockade for so many years is a gross violation and denial of the collective and basic rights of a people. Why is the world not condemning this violation for so many years and not do something to restore these basic facilities for life.

Prior to the advent of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF), even when Jaffna was linked by road and rail to Colombo, the Sri Lankan Government tightened its supplies to the North,

cut telecommunications and started its policy of economic threat over Jaffna. With the commencement of *Ealam War II*, the economic blockade was enforced in more cruel forms. No electricity, no petrol or diesel for transport, agriculture etc., no regular postal communication. All incoming mail to the North was kept in Colombo for months, opened up by the armed forces and often cash was stolen. Even individual persons travelling to the North could not carry sufficient medicines and milk foods for their own use. How many hundreds have died for want of nourishment and medicine, from the shock of bombs and shells at nights, from being unable to reach a hospital in the South?

Is this not an arrogant and inhuman act of the Sri Lankan Government to strangulate the social, community and physical life of its own people by an economic blockade for so many years? Is this denial not a misuse of the basic necessities of life as a weapon of war to subjugate a people, to bend their collective political will and force them to their knees to accept the will of the government?

17. Why is the world media not reacting to the Media Blockade that makes genocidal crimes possible behind closed-doors?

Media-blockade is a serious violation of the right of the whole world to know the truth. It is a violation of the freedom of the media. And when this truth is about the death and disappearances of lives and properties, about the crimes against a people, the media-blockade is a crime.

A democracy that conducts a war from public funds and begging bowl, must have an accountability to tell the whole truth to its citizens and to the world.

Why are Human Right Activists splitting hairs on the reports issued by the Government on a few individual violations of the LTTE, while questioning neither the objectivity, the dependability and credibility of these reports, nor the collective and massive violations of human rights by the Government in con-

ducting a war for peace “behind closed-doors”, and not allowing independent journalists and cameramen to report on the aerial bombings and artillery shelling and the starvation caused by the economic blockade?

18. Are not restrictions on the Non - Governmental Organisations (NGO) stifling the urgent humanitarian assistance to the victims of war?

Humanitarian services in a situation of war need freedom and help from the conflicting sides to be of maximum assistance to the victims of war. As one who has been in contact with the various NGOs operating in the war zone, I have come to know their plight in doing their work. Without sufficient freedom of move-



ment, equipment for communications, medicines and materials, many of them tend to be ineffective and frustrated.

Just one example: From the 18th. of July 1996, the Government Forces at Vavuniya checkpoint stopped all vehicle movement to the

North. One week later, on the 25th. of July 1996, the Government declares curfew and prohibits any movement of vehicles, even those of the NGOs with their respective flags. The NGOs left the district immediately on their vehicles and moved into Mallavi and Madhu on the 25th. and the people, left like orphans, faced the aerial attacks of the 26th. and 27th. of July and had nowhere to run to, except into the cover of trees. I saw for myself the thousands of people fleeing with children in their hands and

crying for water and food. One week later representatives of all the NGOs met at Madhu under the Government Agent of Mannar and unanimously admitted their helplessness - without materials and freedom of movement, they were ineffective.

Recent arrivals from Wanni in Northern Sri Lanka have informed me that the Government is tightening the hands of the NGOs further, in their efforts to subjugate the people by starvation. Already the Ministry of Defence in Colombo and the Commissioner for Essential Services in Colombo had a severe control in issuing permits for the transport of limited items. Last week there has been further complaint from the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) that the Government was making their work more difficult.

Hence our appeal to the conflicting sides to create better conditions for the NGOs - more appreciation, trust and freedom of movement and sufficient material to give their humanitarian aid to the people.

19. Our Concluding Appeal

I have tried to bear witness to the tragic events through which the Tamil people have moved during the last four decades, the sufferings they have endured in death, destruction and displacements. I am convinced that the approach of the Government is towards a Tamil genocide and a national suicide. The major violations of the collective human rights of the Tamil people need immediate attention of the international community.

Hence I appeal in the name of God, of Truth and of Justice, to all people of good will in the world, to all Governments which have friendly relationship with Sri Lanka,

- 1) to help the leaders of our country to realise the false and dangerous direction in which they are moving

- 2) to help stop immediately the so called "war for peace" and the indiscriminate bombing and shelling going on in the North and East.
- 3) to help lift immediately the economic blockade and ensure the free flow of food and medicine even into areas non-controlled by the army,
- 4) to help lift immediately the media blockade and allow fact finding missions and international journalists.
- 5) to help initiate peace-talks between the parties in conflict with the help of a third party like the UNO or a group of foreign governments and
- 6) to help ensure maximum freedom and facilities to the NGOs working in the war-zones

So long as the plight of the Tamil people is left within the one Sri Lankan nation-state and unattended by the international community, so long as the Tamil people suffer state-oppression and discrimination in the hands

But we, who are caught in the thick of war and experience the horrors from day to day, and consider our survival as a continuous miracle, cannot be fooled for ever.

of the government and still have no platform in the international fora like the United Nations, to protest against the violation of their collective human rights, they will turn their tears-filled eyes on to more powerful nations and governments. Let not the powerful nations turn a blind eye to the

just cries of a people for survival. Let not commercial interests of selling arms and economic interests of financial investments hinder their action for justice and peace.

And you who live and work in this great country, the USA, be sensitive to the cries of your brothers and sisters for justice and peace and do your best to impress upon the Government of this country to take a more positive and realistic approach in helping to end this war and reconciling the conflicting

parties towards a just peace whereby both Sinhalese and Tamils and Muslims can all live, not throttling one another, but living side by side as good neighbours and friends of one country.

Peace can be achieved only on the recognition of the human rights of all. This is not an utopia. It can be realised when politicians, religious leaders, media, and other organisations rise above selfishness and insincerity and work together with a super-natural motivation.

In my country we all are thirsting for Peace. Many are waiting for it to dawn on them like a morning dew. Few are actively searching for it. And still very few are making Peace.

On behalf of my people, I appeal to the International Community, especially the bigger powers who finance and provide weapons, to help stop the war, to help stop the aerial bombing and shelling, to help lift the economic embargo on us, to open our regions to media personnel, and to help initiate talks towards peace.

Non-violence
as a means towards ending an unjust system,
presupposes that the oppressors show
a minimum level of morality;
I doubt, however,
that such a Ghandian campaign would have saved
the Jews from the Nazis's holocaust.
-Desmond Tutu

9

THIRSTING FOR PEACE FROM A CONTEXT OF WAR IN SRI LANKA

IX CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE SULL'
"EDUCAZIONE ALLA PACE"
SIRACUSA (ITALY), 20-21 GIUGNO, 1997

The address was delivered in Italian as a direct translation from this English text at the IX International Conference on Education for Peace in Siracusa, on 20-21 June 1997 Italy

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Coming from War and Thirsting for Peace

I come to this Congress with a genuine thirst for Peace because I am coming from a prolonged context of war. The war that is

raging in Sri Lanka has been surreptitiously and mysteriously named as a “War for Peace” by the Government of Sri Lanka. But in reality it has consumed the lives of almost 60,000 citizens, mostly from my ethnic community called the Tamils and has caused enormous destruction of properties for my people and forced almost 800,000 people to be displaced within the country and an equal number in many countries of the world, including Italy. In a special manner I recall to mind in this Convention the 232 Tamils who were drowned in the seas around Siracusa - people who were fleeing the atrocities in their land of birth to seek a home for survival and security. As it goes, the war is hastening a genocide of the Tamil people and leading the country towards a national suicide.

2. With a will to save my country and my people

As a Catholic Priest, with the responsibility of a Vicar General for the Diocese of Jaffna, the heart of the war-zone, I have lived through 50 years of the post-colonial history in Sri Lanka. This period has seen the gradual deterioration of a multi-ethnic reality into an ethnic conflict, and later, on account of the failure of successive governments as well as of political, social and religious leaders of the country, this conflict becoming a spiral of violence and war. The present war has all signs of heading towards a national disaster, a national suicide, if not arrested to a peaceful halt and solution found with the help of the international community. Hence my participation in this Convention is not with a purely academic or philanthropical interest of peace in the world, but a more practical interest of saving my country and my people from a national disaster.

Besides learning from other parts of the world burning with similar conflicts, I hope to bring here also my contribution, by way of my experience of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and by way of my religious reflection on it. It may be seen also as a theological reflection on a human and political experience of thirsting for peace from amidst a situation of war!

3. A Witness of selfish Leadership

Through my personal experience in the midst of a struggle of my people for their basic human rights, I have witnessed the role of politicians who fuelled conflicts for their own gains and governments which betrayed the rights of its own people for staying in power. I have witnessed the most inhuman violations of human rights taking place in my country; how political leaders lie to their own people, how guardians of law and order terrorise my people, rape and murder them in cold blood and how, even respected religious leaders, fail to witness to the truth of their religions and fall into a brand of fanaticism that nourishes hatred and fuels war.

In this context of a false leadership leading the country to destruction, it is incumbent on all peace-loving people not to leave peace-building merely to politicians, but to offer in ways proper to them their own contribution. Religious leaders have a key role to play and they must not delay or desist.

4. A Paradise on Fire

Sri Lanka, the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, the Paradise of the Holiday-maker, the meeting-point of world's four major religions (Buddhism 66%; Hinduism 18% Islam 8% and Christianity 7.5%), populated with Sinhalese (74%) and Tamils (24%) who speak two very old and clearly distinct languages and inherit very old cultures. In short, it is an island blessed with a beautiful landscape of beaches, mountains and forests, with a tropical holiday-climate, deeply religious atmosphere and cultural heritage - but caught in this war, it is now a paradise that is burning !

Those of us who aspire for Peace must accept and acknowledge how we have reached this situation of violence and war whereby this paradise is burning. Peace cannot be achieved unless we are involved in a Peace-process of dismantling war. Those who cry for a pseudo-peace or a blanket-peace in a selfish manner in order to continue with their own life not attending to the injustices that caused the violence and war, are not genuine peace-makers.

Constructive efforts for peace-building presupposes a sincere acceptance of what went wrong and paved the way for violence and war. Denying history or the root causes of a conflict or even hiding history will not help in achieving peace.

In Sri Lanka there is an effort made to deny or cover up even the history of the island for the last fifty years, deny the blunders of the Government and the series of discriminations inflicted on the Tamils and speak only of a much later development of the spiral of violence as Tamil terrorism. This false propaganda of the government labelling the Tamil Militants as mere terrorists may enable the Government to get the finance and the weapons they need from the major powers of the world threatened by terrorists, but will not help solve the problem nor take us anywhere near peace. This approach will only aggravate the situation towards disaster.

Hence we take a brief look back at the construction of violence and war in order to get involved in a genuine construction of peace.

B. FROM PEACE TO VIOLENCE AND WAR

5. Three Kingdoms brought under one Colonial Rule

Sinhalese and Tamils have lived on this island for more than two thousand years, fought wars among themselves and with South Indian kings. When the Portuguese arrived there as a colonial power at the beginning of the 16th. century, they found three kingdoms - two Sinhala kingdoms in Kotte and Kandy and one Tamil kingdom in Jaffna. Christianity came along with them and mostly the coastal areas were evangelised. After the Portuguese colonialism for about 150 years, came the Dutch who ruled for an equally long period. The political and the religious powers of the Portuguese and the Dutch did not alter much of the political structure of the island.

But it was the British, who colonised our country for another 150 years, who played an important role in changing

the political history. In 1833, with the fall of the last Kandyan kingdom, they brought the whole country under one centralised administration in Colombo with a Westminster system of parliament. That meant a just and uniform administration of the different parts of the country, but with a strong centralised administration of the whole country as one state. The educational system as well as the administrative system were oriented toward the good of the elite among the Sinhalese and the Tamils and of the British colonial master. For the Tea plantations in the hill country, they brought cheap labour from the South Indian province of Tamil Nadu. For the administrative system of the country and for professions, they drew from the talents and intelligence of the the English educated elite, especiallz from the North.

After a short period of State Council rule, Ceylon was given Independence in 1948 without any shedding of blood thus ending the 450 years of three continuous colonial rules and beginning a new phase of political life for Ceylon.

6. Post-Independence Nationalism of the majority Sinhalese

Understandably, there was the surge of new Sinhala nationalism that identified itself with the ownership, protection and administration of the whole island and its people. Without giving sufficient thought to how to build up a single nation out of two races, kingdoms and cultures etc., the majority, who were Sinhalese by race and Buddhists by religion, thought of themselves alone as the one superior race of the country. In this they were strongly motivated by the *Mahavamsa*, an epic of the 8th century which the Buddhist monks use very much to exaggerate the status of the Sinhalese as the sole protectors of pure Buddhism in the whole island. Thus they identified themselves as the genuine inhabitants of the land. They unconsciously or otherwise considered others, as minorities - ethnically and religiously: as invaders, late-comers, tenants and second class inhabitants of the island. Overlooking the state of the country as with three different kingdoms before the advent of colonialism, the Sinhalese went in for a pseudo nationalism whereby they proclaimed themselves as the new political power of the whole island. Thus Sinhala natio-

nalism, using the British colonial rule and what was left behind by the British as a Trojan Horse was trying to overtake Sri Lanka exclusively for the Sinhalese and to impose itself almost as the new-colonial power over the Tamils.

7. State-Terrorism and Counter-State Tamil Terrorism leading to War

In 1956, with the making of Sinhala as the only official language of the whole country and the subsequent series of discriminations against the Tamils in education, employment, settlement etc., the Tamils, the so called minorities, were oppressed and their democratic and non-violent protests were put down with military force and political arrogance. After 20 years of fruitless suffering death and destruction in the hands of the majority Sinhalese, the Tamil leaders decided al-

When the people move back into Jaffna, the LTTE personel or the LTTE ideals may move in with them. People cannot be prevented from having dreams and idelas. They cannot be completly separated from their own sons and daughters as the government envisages.

most unanimously to demand a separate state for the Tamils to avoid further degeneration of the situation. The Tamil youth consequently took to arms in defence of their people and land against Parliamentary democracy as practised by the permanent Sinhala-majority in Sri Lanka, and against the oppressive military. The anti-Tamil riots of 1983 was the climax when thousands of Tamils were killed, burnt alive and their properties destroyed. It was the beginning of a spiral of violence between state-terrorism and Tamil revolutionary-violence. Now it has become a war between the State Forces and the Tamil Tigers.

8. Present Phase of the War for Peace

With the coming to power, the present President Chandrika promised "no more war, only peace", but in reality, she is waging the most destructive war in our history. The hope of the

Tamils quickly vanished, and the country has fallen from the frying pan into the fire. The Talks between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam failed to achieve anything for many reasons. With an non-justifiable and inhuman economic blockade hanging over the Tamils and with an Army that is not prepared to implement even gazetted decisions of the Government, no talks with the Government can succeed. With the break-down of Talks, the Government at first launched a "War for Peace" on the Tamils from the 7th of June 1995 and later, when the Tamils were fleeing for their safety into the jungles, put out a political package to be discussed by the Sinhalese.

The Government is prosecuting a war that costs 29% of the country's national budget. It is indirectly supported by some western powers and their international financial agents like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. During the last two years alone, many thousands of civilians have been bombed out of existence using Italian planes, British pilots and American Green Berets.

C. SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS HINDER PEACE

While the individual violations have become the concern of many of the international and local human rights organisations and many human rights commissions and task forces set up by the Government to inquire and save face before the world, but there is a serious indifference and silence of the international community over the more grievous violations of the collective human rights of a people for survival and self-determination . Hence I mention just four of these.

9. Violations of the Collective Rights of a People

9.1 Aerial Bombing and Artillery Shelling of a Population

Under the pretext of targeting the bases of Tamil Tigers, the Government has carried on for several years and still carrying on a

series of aerial attacks and artillery shelling, even at night, in which thousands of civilians and their properties have been destroyed. I am a witness of the bombing of at least two of the Roman Catholic Churches in Jaffna in which more than 150 died on the spot and of a school at Nagar Kovil in which 29 young students died in their school uniforms.

Why is the world that rightly expresses shock and condemnation about a single incident of a bomb in Colombo, or in Oklahoma, notoriously silent about the hundreds of bombs dropped and the thousands of artillery shells fired, even at nights, over the Tamils?

9.2 Inhuman Economic Blockade used as a weapon against a People

While proudly telling the world that they are sending food and medicine to the Tamil regions, an inhuman economic blockade is in force for the last six years. In addition, for many more years, the people are denied proper media communication, transport, electricity and other facilities for life. As only a fraction of the normal requirements for food and medicine are sent by the Government, the people are facing starvation and sickness.

Why is the world not crying halt to an abuse of food and medicine and other basic facilities for life as a weapon of war to weaken the will of a people for their survival and self-determination?

9.3 Rape of the historic city of Jaffna

The hundreds of cases of rape and murder carried on by the military on our young women in unspeakable forms, is a scandal for the whole civilised world. We will not speak of them here. But there is historic rape of another order that should be condemned by the world.

With a massive military offensive that started in June 1995 under the title "War for Peace" the State Forces captured

Jaffna and chased away 500,000 inhabitants from the historic capital Jaffna. The burning down of the Public Library in Jaffna by the Sinhala Police Force in 1982, the destruction of more than 80 of the houses in Jaffna, the destruction of all historic monuments in the city including the war-memorial of those fallen in war, the cutting down of thousands of coconut and palmyrah trees - all these amount to a rape of the city of Jaffna.

9.4 Media Blockade to cover war-crimes behind closed-doors

Under the guise of protecting military strategy, the Government has imposed a media blockade over the North of the country for the last two years. No local or international journalists are allowed to go into the war zone and tell the world of the death, destruction and displacements taking place. The war and the economic blockade is going on behind closed-doors.

People in the South of Sri Lanka and the world know exactly what is going on in Bosnia, Rwanda or Jerusalem but not what crimes are taking place in the North of Sri Lanka for so many years.

D. MOVING TOWARDS PEACE

10. From being Peace-Lovers to becoming Peace-makers

There are cries for peace from all sides of the conflict as well as from those not involved in the conflict, but not all peace-lovers are genuine. There are many wishing peace merely for their own self-interests - many foreigners may want peace in Sri Lanka for them to go there and enjoy a good holiday on this tropical holiday-paradise or other foreigners with business-interest who may want to invest their money with some industry in the free-trade zone or some project in Sri Lanka and within Sri Lanka too: not all are genuine peace-lovers. There is the majority in the South indirectly affected by the war, by its spiralling costs and conse-

quences - by its threat to security etc. They all want peace and peace is due to them.

But above all these, there are those who are directly and very adversely affected by the war. Their wanting peace and their thirst for peace must never be doubted. There are those families in the North and South whose sons and daughters have been killed in the war in the North. But More than anyone we in the North, who have lost so many thousands of lives and so much destruction want peace. The government of Sri Lanka poses as a government wanting peace and leads a "war for peace" We say stop this nonsense and begin talks.

11. Roles for the Responsible Leaders

The role of Politicians, Social Workers, Media Personnel, Human Right and Peace Organisations etc. cannot be exaggerated. They have a serious responsibility for truth, sincerity and justice. A greater part of humanity is dying and groaning in pain because of selfish politicians, commercial handling of truth and lack of work-ethics and moral conscience among many of these leaders. Given my situation and experience, I like to comment a little on the role of religious leaders and the international community.

12. Religions teach Peace but some of their Leaders preach war!

The religions are all preaching love understanding peace etc. But in reality how many religious leaders are actively involved in practising or building up this love among the people. How many religious leaders stand up for the values they preach. They preach loudly and condemn loudly but they are silent about witnessing to those values!

In fact we are all concerned not only about the silence that is conniving with the war for peace, but more concerned about the Buddhist leaders who cry for a militaristic approach to the ethnic problem. With a *Mahavamsa* mind set, the Buddhist leaders are encouraging a Sinhala Buddhist ownership of the

whole island and cry for a war against the Tamils who are mostly Hindus. In fact, a well learned Buddhist leader in an interview has expressly stated that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist land denying the multi ethnic multi religious composition of the population but also has suggested a military end to the Tamil problem,

13. Each Religion in its own way

Religions are called to play their roles based on 1) the convictions of their faiths. 2) according to the structures of their communities.

All religions preach love reconciliation forgiveness etc. No religion preaches hatred and revenge. But in situations of cold war the role is determined by how much deeper is one's faith, how much that faith is closer to human life or closer to the temple and so on.

Another factor determining the role and contribution of a religion is its structure. For example Buddhism has a monastic and a communitary-leadership with its organs for humanitarian services to humanity. Hinduism, as a peoples' religion without a priestly or a hierarchical leadership has also charitable organisations. In a slightly different manner, Christianity is called to do humanitarian services but not only that. A prophetic role is of its essence. In a world of injustice and conflict, it has to proclaim the truth that liberates and work for justice without counting the cost.

The great temptation for the church in Sri Lanka is to limit its work for peace to mere humanitarian services and refrain from standing up for the truth and justice as demanded by the horrors of war.

14. From mere condemning violence to preaching and practising non-violence

If you want peace become a peace-maker. If you want to be a peace-maker, then become peace! This is the message of a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist called Nakthan from Paris.



Prof. Dr. S.J. Emmanuel was born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in 1934. He had his early education in Jaffna and later graduated himself in Physical Sciences at the University of Ceylon, Colombo, in 1958. After graduating in Philosophy (1963) and in Theology (1967) at the Pontifical University in Rome, he was ordained a priest in Rome on the 16th. of Dec. 1966.

After five years as Pastor and Diocesan Director of Lay organisations in the Jaffna Diocese, he did his

his doctoral studies in Rome and obtained his doctorate in Theology in 1976. Since then he has served as a Professor of Dogmatic Theology and Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the National Seminary of Sri Lanka (Kandy) and later as Rector of St. Francis Xavier's Major Seminary in Jaffna. From 1992-97 he served as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Jaffna.

He is the Founder-Director for the "Center for Better Society" in Jaffna and Editor of two bi-monthly journals in Tamil. From 1986-1996, he has been a member of the Theological Advisory Committee of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (TAC-FABC), he delivered several key-note address in Asian meetings and has written on various theological issues of the Asian churches.

From a situation of war and its consequences, during the last ten years, he has given several interviews and published many articles in English and Tamil highlighting the suffering of his people and appealing on their behalf for justice and peace. This includes a booklet titled "Church, Politics and War in Sri Lanka".

He has been a victim and witness of the Historic Exodus of 500,000 people from Jaffna in October 1995 and later from Kilinochchi in July 1996. In the present situation of a continuing war "behind closed-doors", army-occupation of his home-town Jaffna and a prolonged economic blockade against the Tamil People, he bears a credible witness to events hidden by media-blockade in the North. Now based in Germany, he carries out a mission for peace in his country through lectures and appeals at the international level.

His involvement in the Tamil struggle on the basis of his Christian faith is fleshed out in his own life. Hence the Chaplaincy of Germany deemed it fit to honour him as the founding father of Tamil Eelam Liberation Theology. This was acclaimed by a massive gathering of more than 10,000 Tamil pilgrims assembled at the Marian Shrine at Kevalar, (Germany) on August 9th 1997.

We are proud to publish a selection of his contributions.

-Tamil Catholic Chaplaincy, Germany