

AFTER THE CONFLICT

THE HORRIFYING STORY OF SRI LANKA'S DETENTION CAMPS

After 25 years of fighting between the Sri Lankan military and Tamil Tiger forces, the Sri Lankan Government embarked upon a massive military onslaught to eliminate the Tamil Tigers as a military force. A massive shelling campaign effectively wiped out the Tamil Tigers as an armed threat in May, but thousands of Tamil civilians were trapped in the conflict zone and were either killed or injured in the last weeks of the onslaught.

Since then, the Government has forced almost 300000 internally displaced Tamil civilians to remain in detention camps run by the military in the north of the country.

The Government says that this is needed to screen out any Tamil Tigers among the detainees and to clear landmines, but human rights and aid organizations continue to express grave concerns about both the continuing detention of civilians and the poor conditions in which they are forced to live. Many of the civilians do not need to stay in the camps because they have family and friends to whom they can return.

The Government initially promised that 80% of detainees would be released by the end of the year, but, subsequently, it reduced this estimate to 60%. As no-one has been released after 3 months, few are prepared to believe that the Government will keep its promise.



PROBLEMS WITH DETENTION CAMPS

On-going concerns include:

- Diplomats, aid agencies, human rights organizations and journalists have very restricted or no access to the camps and are limited in their ability to talk to detainees
- Detention of civilians in these cases is illegal
- Many of the camps are greatly overcrowded
- Washing, toilet and sanitation facilities are inadequate
- Recent heavy rains have flooded some camps and destroyed or damaged almost 2000 shelters in the camps
- Chicken pox and diarrhea are rife in many camps
- There are almost 75000 women and girls of reproductive age who are in need of basic hygiene support and reproductive health care
- 6000 of the detainees are pregnant women who are in need of urgent obstetric care and who are mostly separated from the support of their families
- Many children suffer from chest infections, typhoid and hepatitis
- Children with chronic problems like asthma, epilepsy and urinary tract infections are deprived of their medication as they cannot access health facilities regularly
- Psychological and behavioural problems are common due to the trauma of conflict and prolonged detention
- Health facilities are overstretched with hospitals having beds for less than 20% of their patients
- Many parents are separated from their children and do not know where they are
- The Government is not supporting family reunification and does not allow family members to see each other if they know where they are
- People in camps are taken away by authorities and are never seen again



PLEASE ACT NOW

This situation cannot be allowed to continue! International pressure on the Sri Lankan Government to quickly release the Tamil civilians must be maintained.



Please continue to urge your local MP and Senators and the Australian Government to exert maximum pressure on the Sri Lankan Government, as well as members of the Commonwealth and the United Nations to bring a swift end to this terrible injustice.

Please sign our petition and keep approaching our political leaders until the Tamil detainees are freed.

For enquiries, contact the Catholic Justice & Peace Commission of Brisbane, GPO Box 282, Brisbane Q 4001, Ph (07) 3336 9173, E-mail arndtp@bne.catholic.net.au and blog <http://cjpgbrisbane.wordpress.com/>