
What matters to the BBC

Friday, 06 March 2009

Last Updated Monday, 09 March 2009

Professor Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat and Secretary to the Ministry of Human Rights and Disaster Management, has denounced a recent BBC news report about an impending Human catastrophe in the North-east of Sri Lanka. Following this, Mr. David Loyn, the International Development Correspondent of BBC News and the author of the aforesaid BBC news report, has written to Professor Wijesinha to express his displeasure about the latter's criticism of the BBC: Given below is a series of E-mail messages exchanged between Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha and the BBC correspondent Mr. David Loyn.

From: David Loyn Date: 3/6/2009 3:22:15 PM To: consulate@lankamission.org Subject: Distortions and Lies? Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha I am not responding in detail to the substance of your attack on the BBC, which will be dealt with more fully in a separate response from my editors, although if there should be any doubt that I was faithfully reporting the views of the ICRC, for coroboration look at p 59 of today's Economist, which was based on similar access in London to Mr de Maio of the ICRC and says 'The normally circumspect organisation is complaining loudly of an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe...Many of the displaced Tamil civilians are huddled on a barren beach, awaiting rescue from what is supposed to be a government-designated "safe zone". In practice, it has come under fire.' Nor will I take on your rather curious characterisation of me as young, inexperienced and lacking in academic achievement. I would however ask just one thing: If the situation there is as you say it is now, then assist me in obtaining access to your forces in the field, to the IDP camps in Vavuniya, and to the beach at Putumattalan, and I will report what I see. I look forward to your positive response David Loyn From: rajiva@scopp.gov.lk [mailto:rajiva@scopp.gov.lk] Sent: 06 March 2009 15:33 To: David Loyn Subject: Dear Mr Loyn Thank you for your response, which is most welcome because previously the BBC has ignored all rebuttals, even when they were sent to the directorate. I am sure whatever Mr de Maio said could have been interpreted in different ways, but since the Vice-President of the ICRC told me he had been misquoted I am not sure that I should rely on what the Economist says for corroboration of your interpretation. The problem might be solved if you were to come to Geneva and we met together with Mr de Maio and the Vice-President. We could then discuss any further visits you might wish to make. Today's revelation by the UN that AP, cited in turn by Human Rights Watch, had attributed to an UN spokesman what you had attributed to Mr de Maio, suggests that confusion can be even greater confounded by what seem current techniques of journalism. I am travelling at present so cannot remember what I said that should make you feel I have characterized you as 'young, inexperienced and lacking in academic achievement' but I believe I was talking about academic precision, and it was those who should have checked on the references you cited who were guilty of a lapse. Since you had interviewed Mr de Maio yourself, you had nothing to check, which is why I used the word distortion. If it was genuine misunderstanding, you have my sympathies, as you do if you are not young. I look forward to seeing you in Geneva, please call the Mission to arrange a meeting. Thank you again for caring enough to contact me. Yours sincerely, Rajiva Wijesinha -----Original Message----- From: "David Loyn" david.loyn@bbc.co.uk Date: Fri, 6 Mar 2009 15:42:16 To: rajiva@scopp.gov.lk Subject: RE: I have nothing to say in Geneva. Access on the ground is the only thing that matters to a reporter. David Loyn -----Original Message----- From: rajiva@scopp.gov.lk Date: Fri, 6 Mar 2009 15:53:58 To: David Loyn david.loyn@bbc.co.uk Subject: Re: I thought accuracy did as well. I hoped you would come to Geneva so we could solve the problem of your quotes that ICRC denied. I am sorry that that does not seem to matter to you either.

I assume this exchange is not confidential, and may be placed as a follow up on appropriate websites in the public interest. Regards, Rajiva Wijesinha