
LTTE supporter piggy backs on David Miliband and Navanethem Pillai

Tuesday, 17 March 2009

Last Updated Tuesday, 17 March 2009

Some time back TamilNet made much of a pernicky lawyer called Bruce Fein who had prepared genocide indictments against various Sri Lankans. Unfortunately he lost some of his sheen when, having challenged me to a debate, he backed off when I accepted with alacrity. Though he has popped up again once or twice, he has now been replaced by another lawyer, who works at the Illinois College of Law.

This one, Francis Boyle, an FB rather than a BF, first impinged on public notice dramatically when he piggy-backed on a statement of the British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, which seemed to provide support for allegations of genocide against the Sri Lankan state. A close reading however of the Miliband pronouncement suggests that, whilst hesitating to upset his interlocutors, parliamentarians who need LTTE support for their election campaigns, he was not quite committing himself to claiming that the Sri Lankan state was genocidal. Boyle therefore had to find a new champion, so he now clings onto the coat-tails of Ms Navanethem Pillai, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Unfortunately he – or perhaps TamilNet, which seems to serve as his mouthpiece – is even less careful about how this dignitary is used. The piece claims, using quotation marks, that ‘Pillay also said the "army has repeatedly shelled inside safe "no-fire" zones set up for the civilians, and that "a range of credible sources" showed that more than 2,800 civilians had been killed and more than 7,000 wounded since January 20." This is nonsense. What the UN press release said was that ‘repeated shelling has continued inside those zones’. In discussion with Ms Pillai, we were able to show her that, when the UN had been able clearly to identify the source of the shelling, it had been from LTTE areas. Interestingly, TamilNet’s gratuitous insertion of quotation marks around ‘a range of credible sources’ suggests it has a better idea than the Office of the High Commissioner about the credibility of the sources used. Boyle also tries to ring familiar bells, by referring to Srebrenica. It is not clear however whether he is worried about the Tamils forced by the LTTE to stay in the Vanni, as to whom there are reports of casualties as well as of forced conscription by the LTTE, or whether he is worried about those who have escaped the LTTE and come to government welfare centres, about whom there are no reports of casualties at all. Boyle however changes the terms of debate by now belabouring the UN for assisting at those centres, citing another institution that has begun to spew forth an LTTE line, the Inner City Press, which ‘has been asking for two weeks at the UN whether international aid funds will be used for detention camps in which those fleeing the conflict zone in Sri Lanka will be detained, until the end of 2009 or longer’. Sri Lanka has made it clear that security considerations, and the fear that the LTTE would have sent in potential suicide bombers amongst the displaced, mean that thorough screening is required. These precautions are understood, and Sri Lanka will not give in to hysteria on the part of either Prof. Boyle, or the Inner City Press, and put the lives of its citizens in danger. However, it will ensure that due procedures will be followed in ensuring the safety of these people who have braved LTTE wrath to flee from them to government controlled areas. This is quite unlike the situation in Srebrenica, and Prof. Boyle knows it, since these are Tamils anxiously seeking the protection of the Sri Lankan government, to get away from the LTTE, which no longer represents Tamils but only its own megalomaniac desperation. That Francis Boyle, like Bruce Fein, will continue to toe the LTTE line will not come as a surprise. But it is important that distinguished commentators like David Miliband and Navanethem Pillay ensure that they do not make pronouncements that can easily be misrepresented. Such misrepresentations allow the LTTE to continue to hold onto its hostages, and conscript and kill them, knowing that their agents and supporters can use any careless pronouncement to denigrate the Sri Lankan government, and postpone the freedom, and the full incorporation into a democratic pluralistic Sri Lanka, of the small proportion of the Tamil people still held in LTTE thrall. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process