Callousness of International Community

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Prof Rajiva Wijesinha While doubtless the assaults on the Sri Lankan State will continue, at least until the Tigers can no longer operate either from our shores or elsewhere, I believe the last few weeks have helped us to clarify certain misconceptions.

Certainly the problem that is aired accusingly has boiled down to the one simple fact, that there are a number of civilians forcibly kept by the LTTE in the area still under their control, and they will continue to suffer while conflict continues. Gone however are the claims that they were being targeted by our Forces. Whilst one cannot be absolutely sure that there is no collateral damage, the care that is being exercised now, the results of the care exercised in the first several months of the offensive, the few instances in which there was evidence of where the shooting came from, all suggest that the Tigers bear the main responsibility for the casualties. Facts and figures Again, while massive numbers were used earlier, these have now come down, even though none of those who previously cited massive figures has regretted the exaggerations. Of course when it comes to casualties, whether the number is big or small is not the question - but by dealing firmly with the figures, we have at least got rid of the canard that the civilians were being starved. Indeed we have even managed to supply medical assistance up to a reasonable standard, certainly better than in other theatres of conflict, so the fact that we, rather than the Tigers, have been looking after our fellow civilians, is no longer much in question. Plight of civilians We have also made it crystal clear that it is the Tigers who are not letting these people go. Earlier there was an attempt to say they did not want to leave, either because they loved the Tigers, or else because we treated them so badly when they arrived that they preferred to stay and be conscripted and forced to labour and even die with the Tigers. The enormous effort put into the transit camps and welfare centres, the regular visits, the attitudes of those now looked after there, has made it clear that this is where the Tamils want to be in preference to the control of the Tigers. And, even though some NGOs were spreading the story that we wanted the civilians to wait with the Tigers, that was not a canard that gained much credence. At the same time, it should be noted that what might be termed soft versions of all these stories still remain in circulation. In part this is because of relentless Tiger propaganda, in part because of the sheer ignorance of the Western market to which they tailor their wares, in part because there still are some problems that are blown up out of all proportion. Chief amongst these is the security problem, which means that the movements of those who flee the Tigers have to be restricted. This has been grossly misrepresented, with claims of internment by those who do not understand that internment means taking people from their homes and shoving them forcibly into camps. Where people come of their own volition however, seeking refuge, there is generally a process of screening, and now at least it is granted that this is essential. But instead it is now claimed that this screening must be done in a very limited period, whereas the numbers coming over, the depth of what might be termed Tiger infiltrating capacity, the horrendous nature of the violence that will erupt if we get things wrong, all suggest that great care must be exercised. And the point it, great care will be, for no government can afford to be lax about its primary duty, the security of its citizens. But this means endless attrition, with some members of what is called the International Community even advocating cutting down on supplementary rations until they get their will. Indeed this Community has strange standards, with a refusal sometimes to provide assistance above a certain level. It also makes noises about the immensely successful Confidence Building and Stabilization Measures Project, claiming that it is not the function of UNHCR to fund livelihood development. What it evidently wants is tiny boxlike tents in which the poor IDPs spend the whole day, with no occupation, waiting for bountiful white women to bring them salt and flour and sugar and pulses, nothing more, quietly going mad because their lives have come to a standstill. LTTE’s motive Since however the attempt to say conditions in the camps were horrible did not succeed, there has now sprung up a new horror story, namely that many of those who have come over have disappeared. Rather like the European Minister who avidly asked after the mothers whose babies were torn out of their wombs, according to a young women now settled in his country, the spreaders of doom claim that hundreds have been killed and buried in a mass grave in Anuradhapura. That there are no details about these massacres, no names or dates or provenance, suggests that once again we are dealing with deliberate lies - but alas there are plenty willing to believe such lies. What we do know is that families have been separated in the course of seeking refuge, names have been given, and efforts are made to reunite them. This is not as fast as it could be, but then no other country has so swiftly provided decent refuge to so high a proportion of its citizens, citizens who have been increasingly traumatized by the brutality of the LTTE in keeping them back. But even that brutality is fine for the LTTE, since the claim is that any wounds are inflicted by the Government Forces. Surely any idiot could understand why the LTTE kept these people for so long, moving them from place to place as they themselves retreated, ignoring our pleas to let our people go (pleas not echoed by anyone else, so busy were they then in complaining that they were not allowed to continue to play lady bountiful to the LTTE as well as the people). It was obvious from the start that the LTTE were keeping them to use as human shields to defend themselves, and when they suffered relatively few casualties, why obviously the LTTE was not above inflicting some to prove their point. All this could be resolved quite easily if the LTTE were confronted with a resolve not to be fooled, with a determination to ensure that they let these people go. But too many people have staked too much on the opposite, and so it seems that, while half-hearted complaints about both sides are repeated, the poor civilians will continue to suffer. Courtesy:Dailynews.lk