
Colombo excludes humanitarian pauses

Friday, 01 May 2009

Last Updated Friday, 01 May 2009

By Frederic Koller Close to defeating the Tigers, the government no longer wants to negotiate. Now that the final battle against the LTTE is on, Colombo will not make any concessions. "There will be no humanitarian pauses," said the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the UN in Geneva, Dayan Jayatilleka, at a press conference held last Friday. "It will not work. The facts show that the Tigers use these pauses to launch new attacks and recruit new fighters." On 17 April, the UN made an appeal for a humanitarian pause in order to allow civilians to flee. The Sri Lankan diplomat argues that civilians do not flee during these cease-fires, but mainly during military operations. He observes: "The civilian population of Cambodia was not saved by a humanitarian operation, but through the intervention of an army."

On the ground therefore the fighting continues. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the fighting has killed and injured several hundreds of people during the past few days. According to the High Commissioner for Refugees, on Thursday alone, 11 000 people have fled the combat zone. The fact that the refugee camps are becoming more and more crowded "has become a growing concern." Demonstration in Geneva Friday, thousands of Tamils demonstrated in Geneva and in other European cities denouncing the "massacre" of civilians. Has not the Sri Lankan army been heavy-handed? Dayan Jayatilleka's response: "Our military operations are surgical. When compared with other recent military operations in the world, you'll see that we are being careful. We do not carry out air attacks and do not use phosphorus bombs." According to the United Nations estimates, more than 6,500 civilians have been killed and 14000 have been wounded since the beginning of the year. After many failed negotiations in the past, the Sri Lankan authorities believe that there can no longer be a political solution with the rebels. "Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Tigers, is the Pol Pot of South Asia," says the Ambassador. [Link to the original article in French in Le Temps :](#)