
Civilians escape to government safety, rebuke partisan European interference

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The Peace Secretariat welcomes the latest efforts by the Sri Lankan forces, which have enabled over 5000 more of our fellow citizens to escape from LTTE clutches. It is also noteworthy that this has not been accompanied by allegations of large numbers of civilian casualties.

It is noteworthy that, following the large exodus of over 100,000 civilians in the three days after April 20th, the flood became only a trickle as the Tigers built up their techniques of imprisonment. Our forces could only move forward slowly and cautiously, so as to avoid civilian casualties, but nevertheless they did move. It was however only on May 10th then that there was another substantial number of escapees. Understandably, immediately after that there were allegations of massive civilian casualties. Sadly these were not false, for the LTTE had indeed shot civilians trying to escape, and when this did not stop them, they had resorted too to heavy weapons. They succeeded then in stopping the flow then, and worse, they almost succeeded in throwing the blame for their murderous tactics onto the Sri Lankan forces. Despite condemnation from those who had not even noticed the purpose of the killings, to stop the civilians getting away, the forces continued over the next couple of days to move forward slowly and cautiously. Their patience has been rewarded today with the liberation of thousands more of our fellow citizens. The LTTE tried to stop them by firing, but whether it was because some of their cadres are sick of firing on their fellows, or whether it is because this time they could not get away with lies because of careful surveillance, the brutality of the LTTE seems to some extent at least to have been suspended. The civilians have escaped along the lagoon, using boats and inflated tubes and whatever will get them to refuge with our forces. They are thus conclusively proving the falsity of the allegations made against us, and showing by their determination to get away that one thing and one thing only stands between Sri Lanka and a lasting inclusive peace, namely the wickedness of the LTTE and all those who will not unequivocally call on them to surrender and release the hostages they have been living on for so long. Sadly, amongst these are several European countries who sought to invoke a special session today of the Human Rights Council in Sri Lanka. Even though some of those who signed the petition may have thought they were helping the cause of human rights, many of the countries who opposed the move questioned the timing of the move, just when the LTTE was on the point of defeat. Certainly some countries, such as the United Kingdom and Switzerland, seem to have known exactly what they were doing, and allowed domestic political considerations to trump genuine concern for the suffering civilians. Fortunately, despite desperate efforts, ranging from secretive meetings in their homes with ambassadors in Geneva to peremptory calling in of favours in capitals around the world, the Europeans were not able to get the requisite 16 signatures to have the session on the 14th. Doubtless they will still continue to try, but the LTTE cannot now take advantage of such a session, to claim that Sri Lanka has been criticized by the world at large. It was also astonishing that these European countries did not consult with countries in Asia, or in most of the other regional groupings, before making their move. They may have counted on their general prestige, but fortunately the prestige of Sri Lanka is high in Geneva, and the rest of the world stood firm. Whether or not increasing pressures elsewhere lead to a change, at least Sri Lanka can continue with its struggle against terrorism. Its strongest allies in this however are not just those countries which have shown their support in a number of ways, but the Sri Lankan people held captive by the LTTE for so long, Tamils who voted with their feet and their bodies to escape to the safety of the government. We must live up to their hopes in the weeks to come – but there will be no thanks to the ambiguous efforts of that minority in the international community who seem not to have cared about the encouragement they were offering the Tigers. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process