
Response to Times

Friday, 22 May 2009

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The following response to an article published on May 21st was sent to the Times in London. It is regrettable that the correspondent claims he got no response from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights. His failure to use the mobile numbers that the Times has used in the past seems culpable, since he must have known, being in Colombo, that May 20th was a public holiday. The claim that he left a message but got no response also seems a figment of his imagination.

The Editor The Times London Sir, Your article on Sri Lanka of 21st May was so full of errors that it was a disgrace to the Times even in its current state of denial about Sri Lanka. It concluded, before misquoting me, with the assertion that ‘The Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, which set up the camps, did not return calls asking for comment yesterday’. In the first place, this Ministry is not responsible for setting up the camps, though we are responsible for protection issues in them. Secondly, May 20th was a public holiday, so perhaps you could ask your correspondent which number he called, at which he left a message asking for comment on his story. You should also ask him why he did not call me on my mobile, on which another correspondent of yours interviewed me at length in February, only to produce a report very different from that of the Indian correspondent who was in my room at the time and listened to the interview. The substance of the article indicates why your correspondent feared to contact either me or my Minister, who tells me he was called up on the 21st, and answered queries on this subject, well after you had gone to print. The article is headlined ‘Paramilitaries “abducting Tamil children from Sri Lanka camps”’ with well placed quotation marks attributing responsibility for your story to the ‘Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers’. The BBC, which had used the story earlier (and which I also asked, without a positive response, to record my response to the story) noted that it originated with Charu Latha Hogg. Ms Hogg was the person who first began the witch hunt against Sri Lanka, way back in 2007, when Human Rights Watch first alleged that the Sri Lankan forces fired indiscriminately on civilians. With regard to the substance of the story, paramilitary groups are not permitted in the camps. There have been no allegations of abductions by UNHCR, which has several hawkeyed ladies who make allegations at the drop of a hat. There have been no allegations by them of rape either, except one instance of an IDP abusing his niece, which they claimed the Sri Lankan military encouraged. Conversely the Sri Lankan forces had reason to believe that possible LTTE cadres were being smuggled out of the camp by what are termed aid workers, and they have therefore restricted vehicular access. This may have been the origin of Ms Hogg’s accusations, but clearly this cake has been long in the baking. Two years ago, when Ms Hogg first began to perform, I was told that she had close links with the British Foreign Office, if not military intelligence. Whether this is true I have no idea but, given the recent efforts of the British Foreign Secretary to save the Tigers, as expressed so clearly in a recent article in the ‘Guardian’, it is a story that seems more plausible than Ms Hogg’s creations. Perhaps the Times might care to investigate the lady, and let the British people realize that the executive branch of government is as sleazy as the legislative. Yours sincerely, Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights Sri Lanka