
Sunday Times must eschew agenda of polarization

Tuesday, 26 May 2009

Last Updated Tuesday, 26 May 2009

Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat wrote to the editor of the Sunday Times yesterday, to express his concern at efforts by one of its reporters to distort his words. His letter is carried below.

The Editor Sunday Times Hunupitiya Cross Road Colombo 2

Dear Sir,

Though your correspondent Mr Berenger generally tends to distort what I tell him when he calls, in his report today headlined 'NGOs smuggling IDPs out - Govt' he has been even less precise than usual, in pursuing his agenda of polarisation. When he said that he had not been given permission to visit the welfare camps, I noted that that may have had something to do with the approach of the Times in general, since other journalists had ready access, and today's report provides confirmation for this view. With regard to the question of paramilitaries, I mentioned that this had been reported in certain foreign media outlets, but that there was no mention of this at the meeting of protection organisations, and that it seemed wholly erroneous. There is no need therefore to look into such reports, and I certainly did not say that there were reports of paramilitaries loitering in the camps after gaining access through NGOs. The question of NGOs in connection with paramilitaries never came up, since the whole question of paramilitaries was created by particular foreign reporting. With regard to the screening, that has nothing to do with the reports of removals, since obviously, in the context of so many seeking refuge together, Government has to be careful to ensure that LTTE elements are not mixed in with the civilians who fled the LTTE. That had been stated from the start. I did not talk of certain persons with the connivance of NGO workers being involved in any 'plot', indeed I said specifically that I had no details of whose vehicles had been involved in the alleged incident, but that that together with the crowding had prompted restrictions. I also mentioned that provision was available for workers to operate through vehicles within the camps, and that some - not all - had objected to this and even bicycles. Most NGOs continue to operate actively and helpfully within the parameters laid out. It is a pity that the Times seems determined to go the way of the Mirror in provoking polarisation, when many institutions are actively assisting Government in its efforts with regard to the displaced. Two years ago I was able to ensure a correction in the Mirror which prevented the disjunction between the Peace Secretariat and the SLMM that was sought to be created. More recently I have not had time to ask the Press Council for corrections of the perversity of Mirror, though I have tried to ask your Chairman to look into certain misreporting. His kind responses have not however led to any action, and I assume I cannot really expect anything except pursuit of a particular political agenda. The Times however should try to maintain the generally better reputation it has, in comparison with the Mirror, and I hope you will be able to promote this despite current developments which may prompt further polarisation.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process

The Sunday Times article referred to in this letter can be found here [Courtesy: SCOPP](#)