



People for Human Rights and Equality Inc. (PHRE)

Reg. No. A 0037233S

Correspondence:

12 Monash Place
Clayton
VIC 3168
AUSTRALIA

Tel: +61 (0)3 9548 8494
Mob: +61 (0)427 610 823
E-mail: contact@phre.org.au
Web: www.phre.org.au

Office Bearers (2008-2009)

President
Dr Channa Wickremesekera

Secretary
N Suriyakumaran

Treasurer
Elmo Perera

Public Officer
Ajith Rajapaksa

MEDIA RELEASE

IDP camps: A very suitable place to demonstrate good governance

The end of the fighting in Sri Lanka has by no means ended the human suffering in Vanni. There are extremely distressing reports about the conditions in the IDP camps such as appallingly inadequate basic facilities, widespread malnutrition, families being split up and very disturbingly, sexual and child abuse and abductions.

The IDPs have already suffered unspeakable brutality from all sides. Subjecting them to what is by most accounts a concentration camp-style environment is cruel and inhumane. It is the responsibility of the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure their physical and emotional well being before everything else and to allay fears and concerns about their security. For this reason the camps must be turned over as soon as possible to civilian agencies and authorities.

Lack of access for independent media and humanitarian organisations aggravates many concerns and speculations about the prevailing situation within these camps.

- i. PHRE therefore calls upon the government of Sri Lanka to provide immediate and unrestricted access to the camps for all media and humanitarian agencies. There is no more any plausible objective reason for refusing access to independent observers. Such unrestricted access will put an end to rumours that now trouble all concerned persons.
- ii. Secondly all IDPs who have relatives, friends or places of their own must be allowed to go and the camps handed over as soon as possible to civilian agencies and authorities. This will be good for the IDPs and good for the government. The burden on the government and on the stretched resources of the NGOs will be much reduced and those who remain can be looked after properly.

These two measures taken without delay will alleviate the sufferings of people whose health and well-being have been cynically ignored, neglected and exploited for too long by those who claimed to protect them. The government must now treat them as every free citizen of the country deserves to be treated.

The policy of granting access and letting people go only after the terrorists among them are weeded out is short sighted, inhumane and illegal. According to the parties to the conflict, the war is now over and it is for the civil authorities to investigate and file charges if there is evidence that anyone has breached the laws of the land. The military cannot be let loose as investigators, judges and executioners among a quarter million injured and traumatised people on the basis of suspicions borne of the blood and heat of combat.

The war was horribly costly for all the people of Sri Lanka and for their government. But we cannot cut costs by going for short cuts. Short cuts of all kinds brought us here in the first place.

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