

THE POLITICS OF POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS: AN OBSTACLE TO A JUST PEACE

ISSUED ON 14 MARCH 2000

The latest suicide bomb attack in Colombo has so far claimed 21 lives, mostly civilians. Although nobody has claimed responsibility, there is little doubt that the attack was the work of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam.

The bomb attack comes in the wake of a number of encouraging signs for peace in Sri Lanka. The latest developments have seen the breaking of the deadlock between the government and the opposition, one of the main stumbling blocks for the presentation of a political solution to the ethnic problem, and the involvement of third part facilitation/mediation which has been one of

the main pre-conditions for peace talks consistently put forward by the LTTE. In what was widely seen as a goodwill gesture aimed at demonstrating their commitment to peace, the LTTE also released a number of soldiers held in captivity. The peace process, it seemed to all those yearning for peace, was well on its course - again.

The latest suicide bombing has shattered this confidence and hope, particularly considering the wanton, indiscriminate brutality that seemed to have been involved. Irrespective of the target of the bomb, this kind of bombing inevitably ends up claiming innocent civilian lives. The rampage unleashed after the attempt was foiled demonstrated this once again. As on many occasions in the past, the bombers, it seemed, wished to take as many bystanders with them as possible once their attempt was thwarted.

This latest round of violence comes as a deeply disappointing event to many people both in Sri Lanka and internationally who genuinely desire a just peace in Sri Lanka, and who recognise that the Sinhalese majority do not have a right to force the Tamils to live within a unitary state if they do not wish it.

The Tamil people have every right to defend their democratic rights politically and militarily. But it must be clear even to those who strongly support a separate state for Tamils that similar past acts of violence, whose primary victims were civilians, weakened, not strengthened, the struggle for the democratic rights of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The militarists in the south were able to claim they were the innocent victims of terror, international support for the Tamil struggle became weaker, and the hands of the chauvinist militarist groups among the Sinhalese and their international backers were strengthened. All this facilitated the cover up of the daily terror that is exercised against Tamil civilians in the war-affected regions from which the world media is excluded.

What happened last week has had the same result. It has increased doubts about the Tigers' commitment to any kind of peace process and undermined any goodwill the Tigers may have generated in the south through the release of the military prisoners. The only gainers are those who profit from the continuation of this war that produces ever escalating acts of barbaric terror against innocent civilians of all communities.

Therefore, PEOPLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND RACIAL EQUALITY unreservedly condemns this attack that had the predictable result of large numbers of civilian casualties. We express our sorrow and extend condolences to the families of the innocent victims. We call upon the LTTE to desist from such acts immediately. We also call upon the government to ensure that Tamil civilians in the war-affected regions are not made victims of indiscriminate aerial bombings and other attacks. We call upon the LTTE and the government to start the process of negotiations to put an end to this cycle of terror and move forward to a just peace