



LIGUE INTERNATIONALE POUR LES DROITS ET LA LIBERATION DES PEUPLES
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Media Release

International Seminar to discuss Sri Lanka's Humanitarian Crisis

Geneva, Switzerland

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On 22 September 2007 the Centre for Just Peace and Democracy (CJPD) in collaboration with the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Sri Lanka and International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples (LIDLIP), Switzerland hosted a seminar in Geneva, Switzerland on "Humanitarian Action in the Undeclared War in Sri Lanka".

This seminar brought together local and international activists, UN agencies, Geneva-based ECOSOC NGOs and other actors involved in humanitarian work to discuss the present ground situation in Sri Lanka and explore ways to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population. In all forty-five people participated in the round table discussion.

"The presenters and participants brought a range of micro and macro level perspectives to the issue and were able to illuminate some of the underlying structural factors that have caused the present humanitarian crisis" said Ms. Nimalka Ferdando, President, IMADR.

After welcome addresses by Mr. A.C. Tarcisus, Director, CJPD and Ms. Verena Graf, Secretary General, LIDLIP; the seminar was opened with a keynote address by Professor B. G. Ramcharan, Former Director of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, who stressed the need for a negotiated settlement to the prolonged armed conflict and shared insights from his experiences in the Former Yugoslavia.

Papers were presented by a range of speakers from Sri Lanka, the Tamil diaspora and the international community, these included Mr. Kasinather Sivapalan, Deputy President, Northeast Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR) and Local nominee to SLMM Trincomalee; Ms. Sunila Abeysekera, Executive Director, INFORM; Mr. David Rampton, Visiting Lecturer at the Development Studies and Politics Departments, SOAS; Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA); Ms. Karen Parker, J.D., International Educational Development; Mr. Arjunan Ethirveerasingham, Media Relations Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (Colombo) and Rev. Fr. Alphonsus Bernard, Director, CEPAHRC, Jaffna.

Additionally, papers were also submitted by Rev. Fr. Jeyakumar, Director, HUDEC-CARITAS Jaffna and Mr. Jeevan Thiagarajah, Executive Director, The Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA)

Mr Rampton, focussing on the spectre of colonization in the east, said, "whilst the current landscape in the East is one of humanitarian crisis and endemic human rights abuses, the current focus on human rights issues, which whilst performing the essential task of exposing the authoritarianism and violence of the current regime, is insufficient to capture the cold calculations and reasoning in the intentions of the Sri Lankan State which has once again returned the logic of Sinhala colonisation."

Sunila Abeysekera noted that "every day three people are killed on average".

Rev. Fr. Jeyakumar's submission observed that "the war has socio-political consequences resulting in the loss of security, freedom of movement, and democratic rights. Threats of violence, abductions, extrajudicial killings and insecurity are commonplace. Data indicates there is a general fear psychosis and paranoia generated among the people. The phenomenon of disappearances has enormous social and cultural impacts as seen by the increase in the number of orphans and widows. Most victims are young fathers which leaves widows with the experience of economic burden and social stigma".

Ms. Karen Parker, J.D., also reflected that "this war is not going to end until it's discussed as a war, until the rules of war are put on the table."

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu called on both parties to the conflict to "get together to establish minimum commitments in upholding human rights".

Additionally, Rev. Fr. Bernard contemplated that "For the Tamil people...this is not the first time that they have experienced it [the humanitarian crisis.] Acts of violence and human rights violations will be looked at from this perspective...in so far as they are symptomatic of an underlying genocidal process.

The meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Verena Graf, Secretary General, LIDLIP, Ms. Nimalka Ferdando, President, IMADR and Mr. Prasanna Chandrakumar, Programme Coordinator, CJPDP.

"When organising this forum we were mindful of creating a space that would facilitate an exchange of views and experiences in an environment of openness and dialogue" said Ms. Graf.

"People who have very differing political views were able to put aside their differences to discuss the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately the current climate on the island does not permit such exchanges to occur." added Mr. Chandrakumar.

For further information please see our website www.cjpdonline.org