



# Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation

Head Office: 254 Jaffna Road, Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka

Ph/Fax: +94 (0) 21 228 3947

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Departure of ICRC Expatriate Staff from the Vanni & GoSL's Order to all Health Workers to leave Vanni

It is with distress and concern that TRO Headquarters – Vanni notes the departure of the expatriate staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross from the LTTE controlled Vanni.

The ICRC has been the only international organization functioning in the Vanni for the past four months after the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) ordered all of the United Nations Agencies (UN) and international Non-Governmental Organizations (iNGOs) out of the Vanni on 15 September 2008.

The departure of the ICRC removes the last international witness to the GoSL's attacks on the over 300,000 Tamil civilians in the Vanni. The ICRC has, in the past two weeks alone, witnessed and reported to the international community via press releases, several incidents of bombing and shelling of hospitals, churches, temples and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps by the Sri Lanka Armed Forces which killed hundreds of civilians. In the past two months alone, the GoSL's shelling and bombing has killed over 1000 civilians and more than 4000 have been seriously injured.

These attacks are violations of the Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law.

On 10 February 2009 the ICRC evacuated 250 of the most seriously injured civilians from a displaced hospital. As this was occurring the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) shelled the area killing 16 IDPs. Currently, there are over 800 injured persons in the area awaiting evacuation by the ICRC.

All of the hospitals and medical facilities in the Vanni are now displaced due to targeted attacks by the Sri Lanka Armed Forces. The areas to which the hospitals displaced, temporary buildings and tents, have also been repeatedly shelled and cluster bombed by the GoSL's forces.

The GoSL via the Ministry of Health has also ordered the 8 Medical Doctors and approximately 1000 other health workers (Nurses, Medical Staff, etc) to leave the Vanni immediately or be categorized as "supporting the enemy".

There are currently shortages of food, medicine, tents, tarpaulins, fuel and other essential humanitarian relief items and the GoSL has declared that no further convoys carrying these items will be allowed to cross into LTTE controlled areas. The GoSL is using food and medicine as a weapon of war in an attempt to get the civilians to come into GoSL controlled territory. The IDPs are reluctant to do this as they will be kept in virtual interment camps and subjected to torture, rape, disappearance, and extra-judicial killings for their "alleged" support of the LTTE.

TRO requests:

1. Immediate emergency food and medical assistance for 300,000 persons;
2. Cease all attacks on civilians, hospitals, churches and temples and immediately enter into a ceasefire with the LTTE;
3. Allow all UN Agencies, the ICRC and iNGOs full and unfettered access to the Vanni and permit them to maintain a permanent presence there;
4. Allow the unrestricted flow of humanitarian assistance to the Vanni;
5. Establish and respect a true "Safe Zone" in consultation with the ICRC, UN and the LTTE within the Vanni, in areas that the IDPs are present and ensure its security by having a permanent international presence in the zone.
6. Allow media access to the Vanni to report on the conditions.

Sincerely,

V. Sivanadiyar  
President  
Tamils Rehabilitation Organization

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