



MERCY MISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

8 June 2009

Sri Lanka 'turns back' Mercy Mission Ship - Rejects Tamil Diaspora Humanitarian Aid

Mercy Mission (UK) is disappointed to learn that the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has turned away the ship MV Captain Ali, which the government, after detaining and thoroughly inspecting for 111 hours (4.5 days), has admitted is carrying a purely humanitarian cargo.

The Mercy Mission ship is carrying 884 tons of desperately needed emergency humanitarian aid (food, medicine and medical supplies) destined for the approximately 300,000 Tamil civilians held in internment camps by the GoSL.

In light of the ongoing humanitarian crisis unfolding in the internment camps and the GoSL's numerous appeals for "assistance" and "funding" from the international community, it is disheartening that the GoSL has rejected, on very flimsy grounds, the attempts by the Tamil Diaspora to provide this vitally needed emergency humanitarian aid.

This Mercy Mission ship, the product of the hard work of thousands of volunteers in the UK and Europe and donations from tens of thousands of Tamils throughout the world, could have been, and in fact, should have been, used by the GoSL as an opportunity to show it's bona fides and engage with the Tamil



Five (5) SL Navy vessels detain Mercy Mission Ship in International waters - 04 June 2009



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Diaspora as a means to begin the process of reconciliation in, in the government's words, "post-conflict" Sri Lanka.

The GoSL has been quoted in media reports as stating that the ship was being detained because certain protocols were not followed and paperwork was not filed in a timely manner. These tasks are the purview of the shipping agent and the ship owner and if they did not follow proper



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procedure Mercy Mission (UK) extends its apologies. But this is a petty reason to deny the Tamil civilians in the internment camps desperately needed humanitarian relief.

Unfortunately, the GoSL continues to show its true colors when it comes to dealing with the Tamil civilians and fulfilling its responsibilities vis a vis international humanitarian and human rights law. The GoSL continues to deny, and

The SL Navy escorted the Mercy Mission Ship into SL waters and where they boarded and searched the vessel. The SLN stayed on board throughout the almost 5 days of detention.

unreasonably restrict, access to the internment camps by local and international NGOs, the UN, the ICRC and other humanitarian and human rights organization. Adequate amounts of humanitarian assistance are not getting into the camps and cases of death by starvation have been reported by the Government's own Judicial Medical Officer.

It seems that the future will just be a continuation of the past where the Tamil



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Diaspora is demonized and the Tamils on the island are treated as second class citizens whose voice is silenced by extra-judicial executions, disappearance, secret detentions, rape, torture, bombing, shelling and starvation and the international community will continue to sit back in silence and allow it to happen because it is an "internal issue".

Mercy Mission (UK) is disappointed that this cargo of desperately needed emergency humanitarian relief has been rejected by the GoSL, but we assure all of our donors and volunteers that this food and medicine will reach Tamil refugees and that their efforts and donations will not be in vain. We pledge to continue to work harder in order to assist those in need in the NorthEast.

Mercy Mission also wishes to express concern for Mr. Athmanathan, an independent Colombo based businessman, who is being detained by the CID. He was never on the ship and never came into contact with the cargo, he had only agreed to be named as the consignee for the ship's cargo and assist in clearing it through customs.

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Colombo, Sri Lanka Skyline from the Mercy Mission Ship – MV Captain Ali

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