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NORTH EAST SECRETARIAT ON HUMAN RIGHTS
NESOHR

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NESOHR report on the attack on Sampoor village issued on 25 March 2006

This report describes the attack on the fishing village of Sampoor in Trincomalee (see map) by the Sri Lankan Navy on 20 and 21 March 2006. This attack resulted in the denial of: 1) property rights; 2) livelihood rights; 3) security of person; and 4) educational rights of children. Listening to the people of Sampoor after the incident, it is easy to see that it was pure luck that no one died in the one sided attack by SLN on a fishing village.

Large Sri Lankan Navy Camp – 10 Kms from Sampoor



About Sampoor fishermen

Sampoor is in the LTTE controlled area of Trincomalee in Northeast. It has a fishing population of about 400 fishing families who have been fishing for generations in these shores. All of the fishermen in Sampoor lost all their belongings in the December 2004 Tsunami. The President of the Fishermen Cooperative for Sampoor, Krishnapillai says,

“After long delays, on 5 March 2006, some of the families using boats, nets and engines donated by INGOs went to the sea for the first time after the tsunami. SLN opened fire at them. The frightened fishermen left their nets in the sea and ran to the shore”.

The Sampoor fishermen have been subjected to constant harassment by the SLN throughout the ceasefire period of four years. As a result the fishermen restricted their fishing to within 1 Km from the shores. In the recent months they have not been able to do even this due to increased level of harassment. On 19 March 2006 some of the fishermen were fishing using lamps from the shore. They did not venture even 500 metres into the sea. SLN opened fire at them and damaged two of their boats. The fishermen swam to the shore.

The attack

At 11.00 am on 20 March 2006, Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) opened fire on the village of Sampoor. While both LTTE and SLN have accused each other of firing at the other, it is the people's account that is presented here. One of the points raised by the villagers is that the wide spread shelling on the village is unwarranted to neutralize any perceived possibility of attack on the SLN by LTTE.

The following people from the village of Sampoor have given us statements about the SLN firing on 20 March 2006.

Principal of the school Sampoor Maha Vidyalayam: *“At 12 noon on 20 March 2006, SLN stationed in the sea near Sampoor opened fire towards Sampoor and several bullets and shells belonging to heavy weapons fell on our school playground. Our students and teachers are terrified as a result. The classes and learning have been disrupted by this”.*

M Rasakumar: *“I was working on a project supported by the Italian organization INTERSAS in their office in Sampoor. On 20 March 2006 at 12.45 pm two shells fell on the roof of the office of INTERSAS. There were two big holes in the roof and the walls of the office were also damaged as a result. Luckily no one was hurt. However, my job is in jeopardy because many of my co-workers have refused to continue to work and have gone elsewhere”.*

The following homeowners in Sampoor, each from a different home has given us their account of what happened.

Varaladchmi, whose home was damaged by the shelling, lost her husband to the December 2004 Tsunami. **Sugunathas**, whose home was damaged, is a traditional fisherman and yet was eking out a living as a labourer because of the harassment by SLN at sea.

Shells fell into the section of **Tamilselvi** and broke trees. Shells fell through the roof of the home of **Kathiravelupillai**. Shell fell right next to **Revathy** who was at her home. Shells started falling in **Kandu's** home and he picked up his children and ran to a relative's house. Shells fell next to the sleeping **grandchild of Savithri**. Shells also fell

in the homes of **Sivanesarasa, Uthayan, Nagaiah, Panchakili, Kamalanathan, and Krishnapillai.**

Human rights of Sampoor fishing community

Child rights: It is not difficult to imagine the psychological effect of the shelling described below on the children. School principal of Sampoor Maha Vidyalam told us about how the education at school has been disrupted. Parents told us how they picked up their children and ran as the shells started to fall all around their homes. A shell fell right next to a sleeping baby.

Property rights: Several homes were damaged by this shelling. These are the same people who lost everything in the December 2004 Tsunami. An office belonging to the Italian INGO, INTERSAS was also damaged. They were involved in a building project and this project is in jeopardy after the shelling.

Livelihood rights: The livelihood of fishermen is constantly violated by the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) which placed many restrictions on; 1) where they can fish, 2) when they can fish, 3) and type of equipment they can use. These have continued to be tightened in recent months. The shelling has frightened the fishermen so much, now they are too scared to even enter the waters.

NESOHR Team