Statement of a Group of Concerned Tamils of Sri Lanka

We appeal to all concerned to attend to the pressing needs of the time. We appeal to the government of Sri Lanka and all other concerned parties to allay the fears of the Tamil people and to address the dire needs of all those affected by the recent onslaught of war.
The end of the war is most welcome, but the enormous death toll is a cause for great concern, as also the condition of very many survivors. The immediate and most pressing needs in relation to close to 300,000 recent IDPs include the following:

1) Emergency relief in the form of food, water, medical services, shelter etc
2) Information and contact with family members and other loved ones
3) Escape from isolation through freedom of movement and communication
4) Expediting the transfer of all IDP camps from military to civil administration with lead roles for the relevant Provincial, District and Divisional level administrative officers
5) Assurance of a short time frame (the 180 days announced by the state after the meeting with the Indian delegation on May 21, 2009 is too long a period) within which IDPs will be assisted to resettle in their original homesteads
6) Any screening, to identify those against whom the state may wish to frame charges, needs to be done speedily and transparently in the presence of ICRC and UN agencies; family members need to be promptly informed of any arrest, detention or release

We ask for a quick and effective delivery on all these above issues as this would help alleviate the plight of the people who have already undergone extreme hardship.

The administration of the entire region has become highly militarised. While a measure of militarization might have been unavoidable in war time, the restoration and strengthening of civil administration throughout the region is now due. This would be a major step towards normalcy and securing the cooperation of the local population in reconciliation and peace building activities.

The Resettlement and Rehabilitation programme should cover not only the new IDPs of the past few months but all those displaced in earlier years, of all ethnic communities, whether in the course of war or in acts of ethnic cleansing.

De-mining is of the highest priority. The next priority is restoration of damaged infrastructure (roads, public transport, public utilities, health services, educational services, commercial institutions etc). Returning IDPs need to be assisted to rebuild their homes and livelihoods, with due compensation paid in respect of injuries and deaths on account of war / terrorism, as in the case of citizens elsewhere.

The IDPs and the elected leaders of the region, assisted by a team of serving and recently retired public servants familiar with the area and to the local population, should participate in the planning and implementation of programmes to Resettle, Rehabilitate and Reconstruct.

Many state, non-state and private sector institutions involved in Resettlement, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and other Development activities in the region would need to recruit very large numbers of personnel with a range of skills as required. Since the bulk of the IDPs and other local population have become unemployed and impoverished in the course of the war, they are entitled to priority consideration in such recruitment. An official statement proclaiming such a policy would be appropriate.

The resettlement of IDPs should precede the holding of Local Government, Provincial and National elections so as to enable IDPs to participate in electing their political representation. Every citizen, wherever resident, is entitled to protection from any harassment on account of ethnicity or political orientation. But even from Colombo there are disturbing reports such as of Tamils, “ being ridiculed after the LTTE defeat was announced and harassed for money by groups of thugs. Even in government departments this had happened… if these conditions continue, before long a neo- LTTE group will spring up”. The situation is such that the problem needs to be urgently addressed, even though victims may not take the initiative for fear of further harassment.

To avoid further conflict erupting and to assist in nation building, the causes of the war need to be addressed effectively and without delay. We welcome the reference in the Human Rights Council Resolution adopted on May 27,2009 to the commitment of the President of Sri Lanka “ to a political solution with the implementation of the 13th Amendment to a broader dialog with all parties in order to enhance the process of political settlement and to bring about lasting peace and development in Sri Lanka based on consensus among and respect for the rights of all ethnic and religious group inhabiting it “. A political package acceptable to all ethnic groups does need to be worked out and implemented without delay, drawing inspiration from but going beyond the various earlier proposals developed over the decades. That political package would provide for the equality of all the citizens, for regional autonomy and for the integrity of Sri Lanka.

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