



Refugee Voice

June 2006

Produced by Jesuit Refugee Service Singapore—for private circulation only

Join us for

WORLD REFUGEE DAY MASS 2006

to pray for *Peace* in Sri Lanka

Thur 29 June
7.30 pm

Church of St Ignatius

Main celebrant:
His Grace, Archbishop
Nicholas Chia



To tie in with WRD Mass 2006, this issue focuses on:

SRI LANKA

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SRI LANKA — Will peace ever dawn?

The eighteen-year civil war in Sri Lanka between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government ended with a ceasefire agreement in April 2002. The mood was against a war as the war-weary people had witnessed a new life of peace since 2002. There were no suicide bombings, curfews, or raids in the south, and the economy had been growing. Due to international pressure, peace talks which had broken down in 2003 resumed in February 2006 with further talks planned for April 25-26.



A woman grieves for her son who died fighting in the civil war



Will Sri Lankan children know long-term peace?

Renewed Violence

In mid-April, there was renewed violence at Trincomalee, (where there are equal number of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims) including:

- killing of a Tamil political leader
- attacks on the army & a navy bus
- a parcel bomb explosion
- an attack on shops and vehicles by an angry Sinhalese mob
- the killing of a Sinhalese youth

- burning of a Hindu temple and about 100 huts in 4 Tamil villages.

Imminent War

By late April, tension was high; LTTE refused to attend peace talks unless the government cleared all security hurdles for them. On April 25th, the situation worsened:

- a suicide bomber jumped on the car of the Sri Lankan Chief of Army. He escaped, 10 others killed, 25 injured.
- the government imposed curfew in Trincomalee and conducted aerial bombing on 6 districts
- shells fell on 20 villages damaging property and killing people
- exchange of fire between LTTE and government forces in Batticaloa

In the north and east, the situation is tense and people are afraid to go out. If things do not improve, war seems imminent.

Condensed from a report by Paul Newman, JRS South Asia

Talk on the latest situation in Sri Lanka
by Fr P. S. Amalraj, Regional Director, JRS South Asia
Date & Time: Monday, 3rd July 2006, ??? pm
Venue: St Anthony's Church, 25 Woodlands Ave 1

Sri Lanka – why the war?



"I have only one eye to cry with now"

says Siluvai who saw her husband killed, her son mutilated and her pregnant daughter-in-law killed in a bomb blast. She lost her left eye in artillery fire.



Ranjit, 11, war orphan

"War is futile because it creates generations of people like me, invalid and handicapped. This must be stopped: resources are being destroyed and wealth is wasted. Peace must prevail."

Kamalavathini, who lost her leg and saw her parents, grandparents and brother die due to artillery shell fire

Sri Lanka's 19 million population comprise the ethnic majority Buddhist Sinhalese sect (74%) concentrated in the southwest and a Tamil minority (17%) in the north and east.

Rise of sectarian tension

For the last two decades, the island has been scarred by a bitter civil war. Under the British administration, the increasing literacy of the Tamils caused the Sinhalese community to be under-represented in the civil service, medicine and law. Sinhalese resented what they saw as favouritism towards the mainly Hindu Tamils.

After independence, the growth of Sinhala nationalism fanned the flames of ethnic division. The Tamils' fears were reinforced when S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike triumphed in the 1956 elections. He declared Sinhala the country's official language, the harbinger of a series of policies perceived as discriminatory to Tamils.

There were some outbreaks of violence and radicalisation among Tamil groups. By mid-70s, Tamil politicians were demanding a separate state -"Tamil Eelam"- in north and east Sri Lanka, areas of traditional Tamil settlement.



Tens of thousands left homeless

Bid for separatism

In 1977 elections, the Tamil United Liberation Front won all seats in Tamil areas but its

members were forbidden from entering parliament. Non-violent efforts to achieve independence ensued. But the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sought an independent state by force. They became the de-facto government in the north with its own army, navy, police force, borders and time zone.

Full-scale war

In 1983 full-scale war erupted. Riots broke out all over Sri Lanka after Tamil guerrillas attacked and killed Sri Lankan military forces in the north. Security forces attempted to suppress the LTTE and other militant groups. People from all ethnic groups were innocent victims of the fighting.



War victims at Vanuniya Base Hospital

Hundreds were killed in Colombo; tens of thousands were left homeless, and more than 100,000 fled to south India. Each side in the conflict accused the other of violating human rights.

LTTE carried out these critical suicide bombings in Colombo:

- Sri Lankan President killed (1993)
- Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist site bombed (1998)
- President Kumaratunga wounded at election rally (1999)
- Sri Lanka's International Airport attacked (2001)

These acts caused the international community to label the LTTE a terrorist organisation and take measures to halt their overseas funding.

Suffer the Innocent



Food is scarce

Sri Lankan Civil War Statistics:

65,000
Killed

800,000
homeless

350,000
refugees/IDPs

In recent years:

379,000
returned home

78,300
in welfare centres

After April 25 violence:

5,000
in makeshift centres



Refugee camps are over-crowded, hot and spartan

The Sri Lankan civil war has been extremely brutal. Civilians have suffered a great deal with grave human rights violations committed by both sides. There have been:

- acts of ethnic cleansing
- extra-judicial killings & torture
- deliberate targeting of civilians
- killing of refugees sheltering in places of worship
- abductions, rape, robbery
- the forced use of child soldiers



Anandan, 4, crippled in the war

The violence has killed more than 65,000 people. Over 800,000 people have fled their homes over the course of the war, an estimated 350,000 of whom are still refugees abroad or are internally displaced people in Sri Lanka.

Refugees in India

Many refugees fled to different parts of Sri Lanka (becoming internally displaced people or IDPs). Others fled to Tamil Nadu state in Southern India. Some 230,000 Sri Lankans arrived in India after the anti-Tamil riots of 1983. They were at first met with some sympathy. A steady stream of refugees fled across the Palk Straits - separating Sri Lanka from India - paying traffickers involved in cross-border trade Rs 2000 to Rs 6000 for one-way travel. At the mercy of smugglers and human traffickers they risked being arrested or attacked by the Sri Lankan Navy, or the LTTE Sea Tigers.

On arrival in India, they were sent to a transit centre, and then to one of the more than 100 refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. After that it is a long haul, awaiting an ever-elusive peace amid dreams of safe return.

Internally Displaced

The situation for the internally displaced has improved in recent years. An estimated 379,000 have been able to return to their homes assisted by the Sri Lankan government and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Nonetheless, an estimated 78,300 displaced people still live in government-run welfare centres, unable to return home due to property theft in their absence, the threat of mines on formerly-owned land, lack of confidence in the security situation and fear of renewed violence.



Renewed violence means more people displaced from their homes

Fresh violence in April 2006 displaced thousands more families. These displaced people have been sheltered in schools and there have been no efforts on the part of the government to help them. What is in store for these innocents faced with the onslaught of circumstances beyond their control?



"...much spiritual benefit will come to all of us by serving the refugees."

Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ, JRS Founder

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**Thank you for
making our work with
refugees possible**

JRS serves the displaced in Sri Lanka

Since the 1980s, the Jesuit Refugee Service has been working with refugees from the civil war in both Sri Lanka & India, providing social support programs. In Dec 2004, a tsunami killed 31,000, displaced 500,000 people and destroyed thousands of homes, businesses and the fishing industry. Coupled with the latest violence between the LTTE and the government, JRS affirms its triple mission: *to accompany, to serve and to plead the cause* of refugees and internally displaced.



His Grace, Archbishop Nicholas Chia opening a JRS education centre during his visit to Sri Lanka in 2004

JRS Programs in Sri Lanka

Its objective is to rebuild war- and tsunami-affected communities with special attention to education of children and income-generating projects for women. The number of persons (or *families) benefitting from each program (JRS Sri Lanka Annual Report 2005) are:

Educational Programs (schools/orphanages/scholarships)	46,944
Human Resource Development (teacher & leader training/counselling)	5,560
Life Skill Center (crafts/hygiene)	424
Center for physically challenged children	18
Vocational Training Center (tailoring/electrician/motor mechanic)	502
Production Center	128
Development units (Livelihood Prog) (village/fisheries/widows/disabled)	*3,177
Construction (homes/schools)	505
Self Help Group (micro-credit plan)	400
Indian Returnees Assistance	1,257
Human Rights & Peace Program	4,041
Tsunami Emergency Relief	88,571
TOTAL	151,527



JRS vocational training centre



JRS focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable—women & children

JRS Sri Lanka faces many difficulties in carrying out these programs such as shortage of trained staff, travel and access to remote areas, post-tsunami complications, and lack of funds. We in Singapore can help the people of Sri Lanka through our donations and prayers.

About Our Organisation

JRS is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve and plead for the rights of refugees and internally displaced people. Founded by the Jesuits in 1980, their priority is to be where the need is greatest or where no other organisation is present.