

# Information Bulletin No. 27

Date of Release : 19<sup>th</sup> October 2001

## The LTTE, Child Soldiers and Serial Disasters :

### A Challenge Without an Answer?

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*Subsequent to our Bulletin 26 on child conscription in the East, there were news reports on the subject and a press release from AI. This bulletin updates the earlier one and elucidates how little the LTTE has been constrained by the publicity. We underscore the predicament of children in the rural East and the powerlessness of parents. At present the international community is preoccupied with what the powers-that-be have dubbed a "war on terrorism" and its tragic fallout. The local media and political establishment are playing out their power games with callous disregard for the gaping pitfalls just ahead. The ongoing tragedy in a corner of this island would tend to be therefore passed by with indifference. Being mindful of this, and yet knowing the trauma of the families concerned, and their desperate entreaties, we feel impelled to publish this update. We trust that these victims would be given a hearing, at least by those who understand the gravity of phenomena involving child soldiers. Their outgrowth, we well know, cannot be confined to a time and place.*

**0. Beyond Grief and Beyond Justice**

The trauma of events speaks louder than words. Before we go into other ramifications, we give a few detailed examples among thousands. These illustrate the tragedy of families wrenched asunder by criminal demands on them and their children.

**Kumar**, is the 11-year-old son of Mr. & Mrs. Kanthan of Ammanthaveli, North Vaharai. Kumar, the youngest, has an elder sister and two elder brothers. The latter are in Sammnathurai to the south, working in a rice mill. After the LTTE started its forced recruitment, it detained the father and mother in a labour camp, expecting the two elder boys to return. After 15 days, this ploy having failed, the LTTE released the parents and took Kumar for military training. The parents were forced to sign a letter forfeiting their house, rice field, fishing boat, cart and bull. The letter further stated that they would never again set foot in Tamil Eelam (the North-East).

**Vathani**, a girl of 13, is the youngest of 8 children in the Ponnambalam family from Mudalaikudah. The LTTE demanded a child and made it clear that a refusal would lead to the confiscation of their home and fields, and the family of 10 thrown on the streets. The eldest, a boy, volunteered to go. The others stopped him. In desperation they clutched at what seemed a faint ray of hope. They figured that if Vathani went, she would soon be discharged as being under age. Vathani agreed to go along with this plan.

Mr. & Mrs. Ponnambalam took Vathani to the LTTE office in Kokkadichcholai on the evening of 8th October. They were given a letter and asked to take Vathani to an LTTE camp in Manalpidy. The parents were made to recite words of mockery that they were giving their daughter to the cause 'wholeheartedly' (*'manapoorvamaha'*), and a video was taken of this 'voluntary' submission.

The parents went to the same camp at 10.00 AM the following day (9th Oct.) to see Vathani. Vathani, who earlier had no inkling of the trauma of leaving her parents and going into a military environment, broke down crying on seeing them. Between spasms of anguish, she asked to be taken home. However, the parents returned without her, the flower of their life plucked away.

**Sivaruban** is the 10-year-old son of Mrs. Thirunavukkarasu, a widow from Vaharai. He has an elder sister aged 16. The three of them came to stay with relatives in Vinayapuram, Valaichenai. This, the mother did for the protection of the children, when the LTTE started its forced recruitment. Though an army-controlled area, the LTTE came there on 15th September and took Sivaruban away by force. The mother screamed, and the sister took poison and was warded for some days at Valaichenai Hospital. The mother returned home to Vaharai with her daughter, her mission having been thwarted.

**Rajabahu**, aged 14, the eldest son of the Rajadurais, is from a poor family in Karadian Aru. The LTTE demanded Rajabahu on pain of expropriation and expulsion. The boy accepted his fate unwillingly. Before he went, he asked his mother for a treat and a bottle of aerated water, a luxury in the uncleared area. The mother prepared the parting meal, and the precious bottle of aerated water was placed before the son. In a fit of frustration, Rajabahu smashed the bottle.

The parents then took their son to the LTTE, and made their recital of 'wholehearted giving' before a video camera. These videos will be shown to Tamil audiences abroad as an illustration of the patriotic fervour of Batticaloa parents and children. A sense of guilt in

preserving their own children in flourishing circumstances in the West, would no doubt loosen purse strings.

**Thevaruban** is the 10-year-old son of Mr. & Mrs. Nallaratanam of Kathiraveli, Vaharai. He has an elder sister who is married. The LTTE demanded his elder brother for military service. This brother being in Colombo, the LTTE took Thevaruban as a hostage, saying that they would release him when his elder brother comes home. Some time later, the Nallaratanams went and remonstrated with the LTTE, demanding Thevaruban back, as he is barely a weaned child. The LTTE refused, saying that they have given him training and will release him only after the liberation struggle is concluded.

**Nalinikanth**, a boy of 14, is a son of the widow, Mrs. Kalalan, of Kalimadu, Kannankudah. Owing to their poverty, the boy had dropped out of school. The LTTE recently came home and took the boy away forcibly. His mother screamed and fainted.

In all the Batticaloa homes above, a funereal air has been overlaid by a sense of guilt over their children. Life has continued in a desultory, abnormal fashion, with cooking done irregularly and consumed indifferently. In the next example we have suppressed some details for reasons that would become evident.

**Kanthan**, who just reached 14, is from Kokkadichchola. He is the second of 3 children, the eldest being a girl. The LTTE came home repeatedly and asked for him. Kanthan did not wish to go and his parents too kept him hidden. The LTTE came and locked their home and told the parents that they would not be allowed in until the boy is handed over. On 8th October, the heart broken parents sent the boy with a close relative, Ratnam.

Having obtained a letter from the local LTTE office, they were directed to a centre in Manalpiddy. There the child recruits and their parents were asked to get into a bus to be taken to another place. It was getting dark and the bus had to move slowly along the rutted road. At a bend, Ratnam asked Kanthan to get down and run for it. This was not observed by the LTTE. Kanthan found his way and was hidden by relatives. The next night, a female relative smuggled him out of the LTTE controlled area and he is safe for now.

Oblivious to these appalling events affecting their children, sections of the well-heeled Tamil elite were indulging in strange rituals. The National Peace Council along with two other groups arranged a plush three-day consultation at a hotel in Nilaveli. Several Western diplomats were also present at this conference in early October 2001 that was funded by a Japanese foundation. The decisions at the conference were to serve as a basis for approaching both the Government and the LTTE.

The Sinhalese delegates were silenced by an appeal to their guilt. Through carefully selected speakers, the organisers set the tone. The main message was that the Tamil people are inseparable from the LTTE and this war is to relieve the oppression of the Tamil people by the Government. Some of the supposedly rural Tamil NPC animators were paraded as those who could show the delegates the Tamils in the 'uncleared' (i.e. LTTE-controlled) area, if they wished. Away from stage settings, however, the reality is too often ironical.

Thirty miles south, in Vaharai, large numbers of Tamils in the uncleared area were moving towards the lines of the Sri Lankan Army, to protect their children from the LTTE. The LTTE

has once more distinguished itself among liberation movements by transforming oppressive state forces into saviours of the oppressed.

The LTTE thus, while on the one hand going for massive forcible recruitment of children, which has a vicious, unstoppable dynamism of its own, is using all channels of influence to replace the PA government by a UNP one. With Parliament dissolved and elections in prospect, the UNP, with help from the TULF (that is now allied to the UNP), will be pushed as the party of peace. Both the LTTE and UNP are clear that this convergence of interests is only temporary.

A group of well-connected Tamil journalists is among those active in organising a front of Tamil parties amenable to the LTTE. After the elections, the bargaining power of these front-parties will be used to push for a cease-fire, where rhetoric will substitute for the scantiest guarantees of permanence. The Tamil parties, and particularly the TULF, know well that this would be the cue for the LTTE to extend recruitment of children to urban areas under army control. In this game, Tamil children face the long prospect of untold savagery, shielded by a conspiracy of silence.

Further cases illustrating the LTTE's recruitment drive are given in the Appendix. Local observers place the proportion of minors (under 18s) among the recruits at above 60%. The youngest in the list are in the age group of 10-11. It is observed that they are from the poorest areas and were invariably taken forcibly. [\[Top\]](#)

## **1. Batticaloa: Throwing Away the Velvet Glove**

In the wake of resistance, by September end, the pretence of a veneer of legality in child-conscription was thrown to the winds. In Kokkadichcholai, LTTE recruiters coming in a tractor and trailer stopped opposite homes. The parents were called out and asked to give a child. When they refused, they were beaten with *panaimattais* (dry stems of Palmyrah fronds having abrasive edges). Usually the children came running on hearing the parents scream. The recruiters then asked a child to come along. The child on declining was beaten and forced into the trailer. The use of this method on a larger scale is suggested by testimony of its use also in Karadiyan Aru. The LTTE's current mood is reflected in the leaflet distributed in Valaichenai (see Sec.5 below).

In Vaharai, LTTE recruiters, including an area leader, were assaulted by parents. According to reports from the area, about 20 civilians were detained in a round up by the LTTE. In this move to make up numbers, children of delicate health become early casualties. A mother from Keluthimadu was imprisoned by the LTTE for not handing over a child. In the night she was witness to a newly recruited child of 14 succumbing to an attack of asthma. The body was handed over to the angry parents the next day.

Among those punished by the confiscation of their properties for refusing to hand over a child, are Nadesan Overseer, Mr. Sundaramoorthy, and the local Notary Public, all three of them from Pankudaveli. Sundaramoorthy was held in custody by the LTTE and his losses include cows worth Rs.15 lakhs. The Notary's wife was detained for two days. A new board displayed at each one of their houses reads 'THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM, UNAUTHORISED ENTRY IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED'. In what follows we examine the new trends and issues. [\[Top\]](#)

## **2. Vaharai : The Writing on the Wall**

In conducting its ongoing forced recruitment of minors in the Batticaloa District, the LTTE was moving area by area, making a clean sweep as it were. During the last days of September the LTTE had intensified its campaign in Vaharai. But there were neighbouring villages where this activity had not taken place, but the writing was literally on the wall. The schools had on their notice board unsigned cyclostyled notices that had also been widely distributed. The gist of the notices is as follows:

*"The Leader is of the opinion that this war should not be prolonged. It must be brought to an end soon so that the coming generations of our people could live in dignity. We must defeat the Sinhalese armed forces that have committed aggression against our soil.*

*" We now have the requisite weaponry, but it is fighters that we lack. We feel that each family should contribute one member towards the fulfilment of our aim.*

Everyone knew that this was an official LTTE notice. The emphasis was on each family contributing one member at least. Age was not talked about and in practice is not an issue. The LTTE had already informed people verbally that those who had sent their children to the army-controlled area must bring them back or lose their property. The dumbfounded parents wanted to make their complaint heard abroad, but felt utterly helpless. A mother of four girls, for instance, who had sent the two elder ones to Valaichenai, was terrified at the thought of bringing them back, but felt she may have no choice.

On 15th June this year, 35 Christian families professing pacifist convictions were expelled from Pannichankerni, in violence orchestrated by the LTTE. The incident in the village south of Vaharai was widely misrepresented as a clash between Hindus and Christians. What lay behind the incident became clear in the coming weeks. On 26th September, 103 days after the Christians were expelled, a similar number of Hindu families from the same village arrived at the army check point near Mankerni in a quest to save their children from the LTTE.[\[Top\]](#)

## **3. Religious Leaders call on the LTTE**

From early August reports of compulsory recruitment had struck fear among the people and had become the talk of the town in Batticaloa. The LTTE had also spoken of an imminent attack by them on Batticaloa itself. After weeks of anguished consultation, a group of religious and secular leaders decided to talk to the LTTE. After an exchange of messages and obtaining clearance from the Brigade Commander, Batticaloa, a delegation led by the Rt. Rev. Kingsley Swampillai, Bishop of Batticaloa and Trincomalee, crossed the lagoon from Paddiruppu and met the LTTE at their office in Ambalanthurai. This was at 10.30 AM on 25th September. The delegation also included Mr.Pathmanathan, representing the Swamy at the Ramakrishna Mission, Mr.Sugunathas representing the Methodist Church, Mr.Kamalanathan the local NGO sector and Mr.Martyn representing the Batticaloa Peace Committee.

The LTTE was represented by its Eastern commander, Mr.Karikalan himself. The religious leaders voiced their concerns guardedly and listened to Karikalan's explanations. The result was revealing in many respects, particularly as regards the powerlessness of the Tamil people before their acclaimed leaders.

Bishop Swampillai told Karikalan that people were talking about forced recruitment by his group. The latter replied that this was incorrect and that the parents were giving their children to the LTTE voluntarily. To back this claim, he showed the visitors a video of supposedly such an event. The claim was belied by the scene of mothers shedding tears in profusion. Karikalan however made an important concession. He said that those who had given a child often pressed their neighbours to follow suit.

When the subject of [more than a dozen] suicides by parents having to part with their children was raised, Karikalan put it down to quarrels between the parents themselves: If a mother, say, gave a child, the father might pick a quarrel with her and swallow sleeping tablets. Karikalan denied that they were confiscating the properties of those who declined to contribute a child. He said that they were only protecting the properties of persons who left and would give it back when they returned. This again as several incidents above, which took place well after this meeting, show, is a blatant falsehood.

Karikalan made no concession to the concerns of the religious leaders and held forth about the need to liberate the land and their aims and methods. He said that this struggle was not a career for them and they would like to end it soon. It was appropriate, he said, that every family should contribute a fighter so that they would feel it to be their struggle. It is because they did not want people to suffer during the coming months of fighting, he continued, that they had asked the people to store 3 months' rations. Batticaloa town, he said, would be liberated by January 2002 and the struggle will go on with added strength.

The Bishop interjected that they [the LTTE] had made similar utterances when they declared a final war in 1990. The outcome, he observed, was that the LTTE fled to the jungles, leaving the people to suffer enormous reprisal violence. Karikalan replied that they were not ready then, but they are now. (It was the same Karikalan who was in charge in the East in 1990!)

Reflecting the anxieties of the delegation, one member expressed the hope that there would be peace before all this violence takes place. Karikalan dismissed the idea saying that the Government is not interested in peace and laughed. Everyone laughed at the irony of the hope.

The question then arose about the fate of members of the other Tamil groups when the LTTE's 'liberation' of Batticaloa is accomplished. Karikalan said that if these other groups join now their fight for liberation, they would welcome them with open arms. But should they fall into their hands after the fight, he added, they would all be massacred.

Throughout the discussion the religious leaders did not contest the LTTE's contentions, but only indicated that they had a different view of things, especially the ongoing recruitment. In closing, Bishop Swampillai made what in normal circumstances would be an ironical plea to an acclaimed liberation leader. He told Karikalan *'to see that the people are not harmed in the process of liberating them'*.

What this exchange indicated is the alarming fact of leading members of Tamil society having lost all influence with their acclaimed leaders. They were even unable to make the most routine humanitarian demands from them. Through their extreme caution, even the Tamil religious leaders have allowed their authority and initiative to be usurped. By contrast, whatever the merits of their opinions, the religious leaders in the South do speak out and are

at least heard. In the North- East, the pusillanimity of civil society has enabled the LTTE to erode all healthy social values, leaving the people at a total loss. The step taken by the religious leaders in Batticaloa must be commended for doing more than what anyone else was willing to do.

The LTTE has destroyed all notions of right and wrong, leaving the people with no grounds to resist even the most criminal of demands. This is clearly seen in the ongoing recruitment around Batticaloa.[\[Top\]](#)

#### **4. The People : Denuded and Disowned**

Some common reactions by parents to demands made by the LTTE to sign off their children, have exhibited the nakedness of the people in starkly tragic terms. Seldom is their first resort to point to the wrong, inhumanity and abhorrence of the demand.

In a futile move to protect their own children, they start clamouring, *"How about your village headman, has he given his son? Why are you doing this only to us rural folk? Why not to the families in Batticaloa town? How about the families in Jaffna and elsewhere in the North?"* It is politics that thrives by feeding on envy, revenge, and on the desire to teach those who escape a lesson.

This ruinous state of affairs is sustained by two things. One is the elimination of sane and moral voices from within the society who dared to dissent. Second, this elimination reinforced conditions where the leaders of society became inert. They failed to condemn inhuman demands made on the people, and to stand by them firmly in the assertion of their rights.

Take the mission of the religious leaders above. Reading between the lines, Bishop Swampillai is no less skeptical of the LTTE and its methods than any sensible man would be. But after the mission nothing changed. The Tamil press tamely reported Karikalan's vindication of the LTTE's stand. Indeed, the religious leaders did not go to Karikalan on the basis of reports or rumours. They knew for certain through a stream of testimonies over eight weeks. But in their address to Karikalan, instead of demanding cessation and restoration, they spoke of 'talk among people', which Karikalan simply denied. The LTTE thus cornered the religious leaders, making it difficult for them to express their outrage publicly thereafter, and to give the people leadership in their hour of need.

The people, so disowned by those who should have stood by them, are condemned to creeping brutalisation. This particular instance involving the religious leaders is just a local reflection of what has come to be accepted wisdom in dealing with the LTTE. It has now the stamp of approval from the international community. Anyone in an organisation having dealings with the LTTE, would risk his career by confronting them.

The *Veerakesari* of 21st September carried an account of an ICRC press conference. The ICRC official said, with reference to allegations of forced recruitment in the Batticaloa District, that they had received no complaints. The Tamil press used this in such a manner as to support their cover-up of what the LTTE was doing. The people of Batticaloa were angry and felt that the ICRC could at least have remained silent.

The ICRC of course knew and was no doubt concerned. A slightly earlier confidential report by an international agency represented in the area spoke of LTTE recruitment of children in

the interior of Batticaloa. It referred to reports of recruits below 11 years, but generally in the age group around 15. The interior was likened to a funeral house with relatives mourning the loss of a loved one.

Yet no international agency on the ground has so far raised the issue in public. The rationale is again one of dealing with the LTTE with extreme caution, trying not to give them cause for offence. In part, this approach has its roots in widespread skepticism about the Sri Lankan State and Sinhalese polity, and their proverbial inability to do anything constructive. This however leaves the cardinal question unanswered: What about the people? A large section of the peace lobby, prompted by articulate Tamils in their midst, has answered this question by asserting that the Tamil people have chosen to follow the LTTE. This complacent and self-serving answer becomes callous and shallower by the day. [\[Top\]](#)

## 5. Back to the Sangam Age!

The methods of recruitment referred to clearly show, however, that the LTTE has no illusions about the support of the people for its project. Its propaganda leaders in the East have called upon the people to return to the glorious *Sangam age*- the classical age of Tamil literature, 1st - 2nd centuries AD. Attention is drawn prominently to a verse from the collection *Puranaanooru* that romanticises mothers taking pride in anointing their sons and sending them to win glory or honourable death in war. The crucial aspect is conveniently suppressed. The ancient bards of the *Puranaanooru* would have been outraged at their poetical licence being used to drag in women and children as soldiers.

It should be evident by now that the use of Tamil classics without context is double-edged. **Ariyamalar** (40) of Kiran is a mother whose young son was taken by the LTTE in late September. She became mentally disturbed and swore that she would deal with her tormentors who deprived her of a loved one in the same manner that Kannakai dealt with hers. Kannakai is the heroine of the Jain Tamil classic, *The Anklet*, by Illango Addikal. Kannaki's husband Kovalan was wrongly charged with theft and executed by the king of Madurai. So strong was the force of chastity in the injured woman that it set Madurai aflame, and its king with it.

By the end of September, the LTTE was angry and nonplussed by the hostility evoked around Batticaloa by its compulsory call to arms. Its attempts to pass off coercion as a spontaneous response had also failed. Instead, there was a brazenly open breach of its pledges to the UN on child recruitment. Earlier it was a question of whether the 'voluntariness' in a child becoming a soldier could be morally accepted. Although the answer was a resounding no, many adult members of the Tamil elite blurred the issue by praising the courage and patriotic fervour of children of the lower orders bearing arms. But what is going on around Batticaloa poses even graver questions. The parents are being coerced to sign off their children in a travesty of legality. It is even more a question of child slavery of a lethal kind.

The LTTE distributed a pamphlet in Valaichenai in early October. This time there was no attempt at formal concealment. It was signed with the LTTE emblem and the slogan, *'The thirst of the Tigers is for their motherland of Tamil Eelam'*. It called upon the parents to contribute a child and expedite the birth of Tamil Eelam in Prabhakaran's lifetime, by getting rid of the 'Sinhalese Army'. Giving some idea of their target figure, the pamphlet observed that getting rid of the 3000 to 5000 strong army contingent in the Batticaloa District would be an easy task.



The pamphlet went on: *"You parents of Valaichenai, ponder a little. The parents of Batticaloa are re-enacting the Puranaanooru. In spite of all the difficulties they are voluntarily binding a child to the LTTE to achieve victory in the liberation struggle. We soon expect the people of Valaichenai to follow their example"*

With sly sarcasm it told the parents: *"We are therefore determined to call on you and speak to you directly in your home."* Addressing the youth, it said: *" Young men and maidens of Valaichenai, rise and come to us, one from each home, to liberate the soil of Batticaloa from the enemy."*

The message was, in short, send us a child or we will come and help ourselves. As one might guess from the leaflet and as is increasingly evident in practice, no age criterion is being observed. We may also observe the shifts of meaning in the LTTE's declarations to different categories of persons. It has consistently told rural folk, as implicit in the leaflet above, that it will persist in a fight for a separate state, whatever the cost. It cannot be otherwise, for it has continually killed those who differ and intimidated those who tried to start a peace movement whenever the LTTE apparently agreed to negotiate. To this rural constituency, any pronouncements on the Government's willingness or unwillingness to negotiate, will be superfluous and even confusing.

It is to the middle class constituency that propaganda about the Government's supposed obduracy, and unwillingness to negotiate an equitable political arrangement, is addressed. The Tamil media in Colombo carry out this task faithfully. It supplies the urban middle classes with justification for turning a blind eye to criminal impositions on rural folk and the continuing decimation of the community, while at the same time treating the LTTE's military feats with children as sporting news. Just observe how Karikalan's simplistic assertion of the Government's unwillingness to negotiate, closed the discussion of an important question - that of child soldiers - taken up by the delegation of religious leaders from Batticaloa.

We need to be clear that we are dealing with very young, unwilling children of unwilling parents being coerced into arms by a desperate and unscrupulous organisation.[\[Top\]](#)

## **6. Child Soldiers and Serial Disasters**

Given the nature of current recruitment, it is useful to look back at the situation in June 1990, which Bishop Swampillai cautioned against. A large number of very young children were joining the LTTE in early 1990 for very different reasons. The Indian Army was leaving and the UNP government of President Premadasa was pampering the LTTE with money and new vehicles. Many children, especially from impoverished homes, ran away and joined the LTTE. To them, sporting a gun and uniform grown-up-like and joining the carnival, where *coca cola* flowed freely, seemed irresistible. But the LTTE was very clear about renewing the war.

Behind the carnival atmosphere, the LTTE was saturating these children with war rhetoric. They were repeatedly harangued on Tamil Eelam being the only solution and the sacred duty of eliminating 'traitors' who disagreed. The LTTE's cordiality with Premadasa and its constant professions of good faith became increasingly incompatible with the highly charged atmosphere it had fomented within. It could not hold down the lid much longer. Even those close to the LTTE were surprised that it resumed hostilities so early in June 1990.

Karikalan's contention that they were then unprepared is very misleading. They were preparing themselves methodically with a series of provocations intended to invite severe reprisals against Tamil civilians. These provocations were made the more vexatious by their total unexpectedness. They included the murder of hundreds of surrendered Sinhalese and Muslim policemen and massacres of Muslim civilians living in close proximity to the Tamils (see our reports of that period). The LTTE then vanished into the jungles, taking frightened boys and girls along, leaving the Tamil civilians in the East exposed to the fury of the Army, STF and the newly formed Muslim Homeguards.

To bind the children who may have second thoughts, the LTTE charged them with hate against especially the Muslims, and gave meaning to their membership as a vehicle of vengeance. They were then made to participate in massacres. We saw then a terrifying march of serial disasters.

That was 1990. Eleven years on, the people have learnt a great deal more about the LTTE the hard way. They have no illusions. For today's coerced recruits there is no semblance of a carnival. The only certainty is death or disablement. The LTTE has nothing to show for its rhetoric and repeated declarations of 'final battle' except serial disasters. These include a decimated population, widows, crippled children, repeated displacement, shifting frontiers and a land treacherously strewn with mines. And the LTTE is fated to go on in the same manner, to the end.

Today the mood among the recruits is far more difficult to handle than in 1990. They feel cheated, humiliated and resentful. They are angry at the way their parents were treated. The LTTE has added to its problems by inaugurating this special technique of recruitment in rural Batticaloa. Faced with local resentment, the LTTE has made rash pledges. It has praised the people of Batticaloa for upholding *Puranaanooru* traditions and added that they have been the torchbearers for all other districts, which will now follow them. They have promised that the same methods would be applied to Batticaloa town, the Vanni and even to Jaffna. The LTTE will be forced to try, if only to placate its Eastern conscripts, and then get into enormous problems.

Consequently, the LTTE will have even less control over events. It is already in flagrant breach of its pledge to the UN on child recruitment. Any further pledges it makes will be governed only by momentary expediency. One of its first priorities would be to bind the recruits and turn civilian resentment away from itself. It is here that the 1990 experience becomes relevant.

The LTTE's vein of politics, abetted by the TULF, has in Batticaloa been steadily building Tamil resentment against the local Muslims. The Muslims are today feeling very anxious and insecure. In recent times the LTTE has squeezed the Muslims for money while avoiding overt violence. The LTTE's new compulsions make the situation explosive, particularly in view of Karikalan's reputation. The LTTE's compulsions must be set against its apparently contradictory support for the UNP and attempts to manipulate December's parliamentary elections. Coupled with the forced mass recruitment of resentful children, there is an explosive build-up that heightens the prospect of another round of serial disasters. [\[Top\]](#)

## **7. The Crucial Challenge**

What was always inherent, and in many ways inevitable, is now taking shape before our eyes as a whirlwind. It must spend itself out, leaving wrecked humanity in its wake. The Government appears too preoccupied to take notice and the UNP is not thinking beyond December's elections. The community leaders in Batticaloa, alarmed as they are, are looking for someone else to deal with it. The leading Tamil party, the TULF, has played itself out into destructive irrelevance. It is now incapable of addressing the realities facing the people. It is fated as it were, to serenade the siren that draws, inexorably, the ship of the Tamil Nation to its doom.

The Tamil leadership and civil society as a whole have lost the ability to tell the people that turning their children into soldiers and torturers is criminal and, moreover, to force parents to sign off their children into such a fate is doubly criminal. No parent has the right to do it.

Sri Lanka can boast of a wide-ranging international presence performing a variety of humanitarian services. They do this amidst attempts by the warring parties to bully and nudge them. At one level there is much that is similar between any two sides at war. But then, it is important to ask if there has been an error of judgement after all these years of sheer repetitiveness :- viz. Cease-fire, Talks, Intensification of child recruitment by the LTTE, War resumes, Civilians killed, Frontiers change, International agencies pull out of vulnerable areas and civilians follow, New minefields, International agencies move back to assess damage and make funding proposals for humanitarian assistance, New attempts at cease-fire, Life goes on.

The priority of the international agencies appears to be to somehow maintain contact with the LTTE and avoid confrontation, so that, technically at least, their work can go on. Given stark choices by the LTTE, they are bound to compromise. One sees something of the ground rules of the game where it has become almost impossible to confront the LTTE and hold it to account. The agencies are confronted with the dilemmas of doing humanitarian work among civilians, whom the LTTE has no qualms about using as dispensable pawns in a military game. In turn the people are equally helpless when bombed from the air by an irate state.

'Peace' has become the magic word to bridge the contradictions of this impossible state of affairs. As a corollary, 'Human Rights' has become an inexpedient expression because it gives offence to the LTTE. We gave some indication earlier on how the 'Peace' game is being played. It is finally the LTTE that decides the agenda and the LTTE has never made the slightest substantive concession to anyone. This is why the future of the LTTE's child recruits looks utterly hopeless.

For example, one wishes the ICRC could say, after 12 years in Sri Lanka, that their instructors have made some impact on the LTTE leadership, particularly on observing the humanitarian law. But take Karikalan's blood-curdling prospect held out to members of other groups who would fall into their hands upon the 'liberation of Batticaloa'.

This was not a perfunctory remark. It was a frank statement made to a group of leading moral authorities in Batticaloa. The LTTE has right along maintained that all Tamils who opposed them are less than vermin. No quarter was ever acknowledged or given, even to those who advocated perfectly decent alternatives to the LTTE's agenda of collective suicide. If all attempts to make an impact on the LTTE as regards the humanitarian law and child soldiers have failed dismally, it is because a malignant approach to these issues is part and parcel of its politics.

When the ordinary Tamil people speak with their feet, by running towards army lines, it is a damningly eloquent indictment of the LTTE's politics. The moral judgements we sought to avoid are being forced on us. By playing down issues of right and wrong as the price for dealing with the LTTE, we have found the contradictions becoming increasingly bizarre. The accepted wisdom of dealing with the LTTE, by avoiding even the very basic moral questions, is irrevocably in crisis.

We must therefore restore the values of right and wrong and of Crimes Against Humanity in this discussion. We are on a firm footing only when we make demands on the grounds of what is right. We are dealing with a tendency where the brutality stems not primarily from those like Karikalan, but from an articulate section in the globalised upper reaches of Tamil society. Their callousness is such that they are determined to prove a point at any cost to their people. Their key success has been their facility to confuse the world about the true nature of the LTTE phenomenon.

The time to be confused is long past. We pointed out that a phenomenon founded on child soldiers is not only an evil in itself, but moreover, the resulting climate, by its very unpredictability, is pregnant of a devastating chain of evils. Whatever the peace community would wish, the whirlwind must blow itself out.

The LTTE's current round of child recruitment must be challenged, stating frankly what it means and portends. What we say, and also do, must leave no room for confusion. The LTTE, as Amnesty International has already demanded, must not just stop child recruitment, but must further release all those taken. Not only the children, but also the young women and farmers abducted from the streets and their homes.

There can be no neutrality in the face of such a crime. If the organisations representing the world community are not seen to take a clear position on this matter, their presence becomes largely meaningless for the ordinary people. On the other hand, a clear stand by them will also help local civil society groups, and finally the parents themselves, to defy the LTTE.

If all efforts fail, and these children are forced into battle formations, means must be found to help them escape and surrender rather than get blown up into smithereens. There can be no great credit to a government in blowing up its own children.

Given the present political uncertainties in the country, the International Community faces a crucial challenge. They must prepare for deadly outcomes affecting Tamil children and take all preventive measures possible. [\[Top\]](#)

## **Appendix**

### **Press-Ganging of Children and Adults**

In what follows we give, in addition to the cases above, further examples of children and young adults forcibly removed by the LTTE. The force is not necessarily wholly physical, although it frequently is in the case of the youngest recruits. When for example the LTTE visit a home, threaten to turn the inmates out and lay their hands on a child, the parents often find themselves in a quandary. Account must also be taken of many years of conditioning by the political environment and the media. Resistance to the LTTE has been made to appear illegitimate and useless. [\[Top\]](#)

## Children

No	Title	Name	Surname	Age	Village	Division
1	Mas	Sivaruban	Thirunavukkarasu	10	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
2	Mas	Thevaruban	Nallarattam	10	Kathiravelli	Vaharai
3	Mas	Rameshkumar	Krishnapillai	11	Ward 7	Vaharai
4	Mas	Vinoth	Sivakumar	11	Kandalady	Vaharai
5	Mas	Kumar	Kanthan	11	Ammanthai Veli	Vaharai
7	Mas	Vasanathakumar	Sinnathamby	13	Ward 5	Vaharai
10	Mas	Mohan	Perinbanayagam	13	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
11	Mas	Pathmaraj	Sinrasa	13	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
12	Miss	Vathani	Ponnambalam	13	Mudalaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
13	Mas	Suresh	Sivapragasam	14	Mudalaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
14	Mas	Rajabahu	Rajadurai	14	Karadiniyan Aaru	Kokkadichcholai
15	Miss	Vinothini	Nagendran	14	Oddumadu	Vaharai
16	Mas	Nalinikanth	Kalalan	14	Kalimaddu	Kannangkudah
17	Mas	Arulraj	Vinayagam	14	Kathiravelli	Vaharai
18	Miss	Thavamany	Perambamoorthy	15	Mudalaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
19	Miss	Rajani <sup>19</sup>	Nallathamby	15	Mudalaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
		<sup>19</sup> Rajani was Caught on the road about 29th Sept., after Kausalyan, Robert, Thurai and Vijayan Master of the LTTE addressed a meeting in her school				
20	Miss	Nadiya	Shanmugam	15	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
21	Mas	Raviharan <sup>21</sup>	Muthulingam	16	Mahiladithivu	Kokkadichcholai
		<sup>21</sup> Raviharan Muthulingam was an O.Level student at Shivananda Hindu College, Batticaloa. The LTTE went home and demanded him. The parents pleaded that he be allowed to sit for his O.Levels, due in December. The LTTE refused. The boy was called home from Batticaloa and his fate was sealed				
22	Mas	Mangalaprabhu	Soundararajan	16	Ward 4	Vaharai
23	Mas	Ramanan <sup>23</sup>	Sellathamby	16	Pandariveli	Kokkadichcholai
		<sup>23</sup> Caught on the road about 2nd October, after Kauslayan et.al. above addressed a meeting at school.				
24	Mas	Krishanthan	Nesathurai	17	Mudalaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
25	Miss	Nageswary	Kopalapillai	17	Mudalaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
26	Mas	Vimalanathan	Konalingam	17	Mudalaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
27	Mas	Priyadharshan	Krishnapillai	17	Oddumadu	Vaharai,
28	Mas	Bhaskaran	Samithamby	17	Sallithivu	Pannichankerni
29	Miss	Geetha	Sathyarajah	17	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
30	Miss	Srikanthy	Shanmugam	17	Sallithivu	Pannichankerni
31	Miss	Kalashini	Gnanasekeram	17	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
32	Miss	Kavitha	Ponniah	17	Kandalady	Vaharai

## Adults

The following women/men were forcibly taken from the streets or their homes

No	Title	Name	Surname	Age	Village	Division
1	Miss	Suthamathy	Sinnavan	18	Pandariveli	Kokkadichcholai
2	Miss	Kiruparajani	Kirupanathan	18	Sallithivu	Pannichankerni
3	Miss	Thapethini	Soundararajan	18	Kandalady	Vaharai
4	Miss	Kalyani	Kanapathipillai	19	Sacred Hill St.	Vaharai
5	Miss	Shobana	Sinnathamby	19	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
6	Miss	Rani	Joseph	20	Kirumichchai Rd	Mathurankulam
7	Miss	Kala	Nagarajah	21	Peththai	Valaichenai
8	Miss	Sutha	Tharmalingam	21	Mudailaikudah	Kokkadichcholai
9	Miss	Kumari	Vallipuram	22	Peththalai	Valaichenai
10	Miss	Sivatharshini	Shanmugalingam	22	Sallithivu	Pannichankerni
11	Miss	Kavithavasuki	Sinnathamby	25	Kandalady	Vaharai
12	Miss	Rajakumari	Subramaniam	27	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
1	Mr	Kiriyathan	Thevarajah	18	Ward 5	Vaharai
2	Mr	Niranjana	Puvanesarajan	18		Vaharai
3	Mr	Ratheesweran	Vadivel	19	Kandalady	Vaharai
4	Mr	Jeyakumar	Rasiah	20	Kandalady	Vaharai
5	Mr	Divakaran	Puvanesarajan	20		Vaharai
6	Mr	Ravichandran	Nallaratnam	21	Pandariveli	Kokkadichcholai
7	Mr	Suthan	Kanthasamy	26	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai
8	Mr	Shanmugalingam	Panchatcharam	32	Vinayagapuram	Valaichenai

**Mr. Gunaseelan (29)** of Munaikkadu was absconding after being called up by the LTTE. His father was detained as a hostage. The father was confined to a labour camp and the strain proved too much for him. He was released by Gunaseelan's younger sister, who surrendered herself to the LTTE for her father's sake.

The total taken from the Batticaloa District may be placed at above 2000. Local sources place the number taken from Munaikkadu at well above 100.

It may also be noted that the children in the list from Valaichenai were taken from a technically 'cleared' area. There are signs that recruiting agents may even be operating in Batticaloa town. In testimony received by us, an eleven year old boy was accosted by a man who told him that his father had been admitted to hospital and offered to take him there. The boy ran away from him.