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Vanni Thamils Forum

President: Dr. Nithyanantha Sharma

2009-04-01

Secretary: Kopalakrishnan M.A.

To: Mr. John Holmes

UN under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Relief Coordinator

OCHA

UN

Geneva,

Switzerland

Honorable Sir,

An open letter

True to form John Holmes has proved to be the artful dodger he has hitherto proved himself to be. He is mixed bag. At one time he was accused as a LTTE agent in the pay of that organization by none other than a responsible minister of the Rajapaksa government. Today to all intents and purposes he has become a Rajapaksa agent and has in recent times made statements in that line. He has made statements for which there are no valid proofes and such statements have issued forth only from the Sri Lanka government propaganda machinery.

We like to point out that instead of meeting the immediate problems of the Vanni people head on, he has taken a stand that is different from the facts on the ground.

Instead of assuring the safety, food requirements, medicines and the assurance of lives of the Vanni people he has taken a stand which is not indifferent from that of the Sri Lankan government. For instance he implies that the people of the Vanni are held against their will by the LTTE. He also in the process implies that a better life is ready for them in the government controlled areas. In the same statement while asking the LTTE to let the Vanni people to go he has asked the same LTTE to stop the forced recruitment and the use of civilians as human shields. We would like to ask Mr. Holmes from where he got these inferences without a visit to Vanni and without a word with the people of Vanni

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without finding out the wish and requirements of the Vanni people. We make bold to state that Mr. Holmes is either indulging in fiction or retailing the usual government propaganda.

We would like to ask Mr. Holmes whether any international problem similar to that of the Vanni had been solved satisfactorily by asking the victimized people to leave their traditional habitat and go to another part of the world in order to solve their problem. In that case the Palestinian problem would have been solved by asking those people to go and live in another part of the globe. To delve into history the Jews were offered a home in California, a home in Uganda and some other areas as alternative to an Israel in the Middle East. Why did they refuse? Because Israel is their spiritual home. In the same vein the people of the Vanni have an attachment to their home and land which they refuse to yield to shallow thinkers like Mr. John Holmes.

In our opinion the UN has in recent times lost its bite. It has taken a safe way out of problems and a refusal to meet the minority problems of the earth. We like to point out to the higher ups of the UN the minority people have the right to live in the land of their forefathers and cannot be a part of the whims and fancies of the likes of John Holmes and his superiors. The UN in the other words has become a helpless organization which is only earning cash for certain officers who have a stake in the UN.

In this connection we like to bring to the awareness of John Holmes that the Vanni soil is one of the worst 'killing fields' of the world. Daily without fail the Sri Lankan government without evoking much attention is killing Tamil Civilians to the tune of 50-60 per day and causing bodily harm to 100-150 Tamil civilians per day.

We agree that Mr. John Holmes is a man of education, administrative experience, and diplomatic niceties with a penchant for seeing through propaganda. We are disappointed that Mr. Holmes with all these rich qualities has failed to see the toll of human lives in the Vanni. This type of killing fields is

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designed in such a way not to create an international outcry but its intent is to reduce the population of the Vanni and in effect cause slow genocide. Whether it is high rated genocide or low rated genocide, genocide is a feature of modern life that has to be condemned in full strength. Mr. John Holmes has failed to do this and it shows the vacuousness of his thinking. Why do people like Holmes refuse to countenance the genocide in this country?

Does the international community have some hope of raising the cry of genocide when the majority people of the Vanni have been slowly wiped out within a matter of months?

It has been termed malnutrition is slow death. The people of Vanni are in the grip of malnutrition. They are eking a daily existence on denuded soya meat de-husked rice and lentils. When the west of the world pays so much attention on calories why should the people of the Vanni suffer for the lack of foresight of people like John Holmes who is in certain quarters is considered to be unfit for the high position he occupies at present?

It is well known that forbidden weapons like cluster bombs, white phosphorous bombs and poisonous gas-canisters are employed by land, air and sea for the destruction of the Vanni people. Holmes has conveniently ignored these aspects.

The government of Sri Lanka has justified the bombing of hospitals and mass killings of patients in these hospitals. Government justification has neither been condemned nor attempts made to stop the bombing by any responsible international organizations including the UN. During the Second World War enemy forces avoided bombing hospitals. Is Sri Lanka exemption to this rule? Why is the UN avoiding any attempts to stop the bombing of hospitals which are managed by the government itself? In other words the Vanni is slowly becoming a land without a hospital. Is there any other country in the world similar to this? Let Mr. Holmes answer this. Hospitals in the Vanni today are operated under trees, make

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shift shelters, tarpaulin houses and hide out places with ill-equipped instruments and unsuitable medicines and medical personnel who are unable to manage the big influx of patients.

We like to point out that due to the ban imposed by the Sri Lanka government and its Ministry of Health suitable medicines are not available in the Vanni. The infant mortality rate is very high compared to Asian countries. And pregnant mothers are emptying their wombs pre-maturely and involuntarily due to nutrition problems in the estimation of a local hospital authority a minimum 12 Tamil civilians have died during the last few weeks of acute starvation. This is the 21st Century and this is a tragedy of the entire human race.

Medicine is an instrument of healing but in Sri Lanka it is an instrument of endangering life. The government of Sri Lanka is making every effort to stop the flow of medicines, medical equipments and medical workers into the Vanni. It is operating medical centers beyond the seas in Trincomalee and other areas to treat the people who have been injured by their own bombing. The ICRC has lost sight of its founder's message and is now ferrying wounded people from the Vanni to the hospitals in Trincomalee. The ICRC in other words has unwittingly become part of the government effort to injure the people and carry them away by sea to hospitals far away from the area of the injury.

We like to point out that a number of people have died on the ships employed by the ICRC to carry the injured people from the Vanni to the hospitals of Trincomalee and further. In recent times the government of India has opened a military hospital in Pulmoddai to treat the people injured in Vanni and carried over by the ICRC. We are reliably informed that the Pulmoddai hospital of the Indian government is an intelligence collecting centre and is not a hospital which it declares to be.

We have already mentioned in this brief that the food that is allowed to be transported to the Vanni area does not meet the requirements of the people. The people are as we have already pointed out are

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suffering from malnutrition. There are no green leaves or fresh vegetables available for cooking and eating. This has a long term effect on the lives of these helpless people especially a younger generation to come. Due to the lack of nutritious food, closed schools, ever moving IDPs and the very impermanent of lives the education has come to a standstill in the Vanni. This is another tragedy which Mr. John Holmes has not taken into consideration.

The government has declared the tiny sea coast villages of Mathalan, Pokkanai, Valaignarmadam and Mullivaikkal as free fire zones but the fishermen of these areas dare not venture out into the sea. The government navy gun boats have killed many fishermen who have done so. The daily catch is very meager and its price is very expensive which is beyond the reach of even the middle class people. The villages mentioned above are overcrowded with people estimated to be more than 300,000. The land is bare and inhospitable and is in large parts are unsuitable for human habitation. But people cling on because it is their homeland. If what Mr. Holmes says is true these Tamil people would have abandoned these sandy wastes and to the so called promised land of the government. The LTTE is not holding them back. The people are part of the LTTE and are inseparable from them. The people are fully aware that their safety life is in staying with the LTTE and not following the false promises of an unbelievable government. We like to point out you that tiny fish of an average length of 2-2.5" and of doubtful taste is sold at the prices of 2000 rupees per kilogram. In European countries this type of fish is not even used as animal feed but as fertilizer. These details are presented here for the edification of the likes of the Mr. John Holmes who are unable to realize what life means in the Vanni.

Mr. Holmes suggests an unheard solution of a mass uprooting of the people of the Vanni to the government controlled areas of Vavuniya and Mannar. This is not a solution at all. If uprooting and settling our people in distant places is a national solution it would have become a standard procedure.

We like to point out Mr. John Holmes that UNHCR was created and made to function as carrying and

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settling people in their own homes and that is a correct way of doing things. What the people of the Vanni require is healthy surrounding, food, medicine and guarantee of life. The government is employing their own forces by prodding the people of the Vanni through the agencies of their armed forces to areas under their control. Mr. John Holmes with his keen intellect would have seen through this vicious methodology but is refusing to acknowledge it or give voice to it. If Mr. Holmes has any wellbeing to the people of the Vanni all he has to do is providing them with satisfactory nutritious food, safety of life and a permanent peace. There is no point in beating about the bush all you have to do is to meet the problem head on instead of accusing all and sundry. We emphasize again and again that uprooting and transporting of people is not a solution but a punishment. The permanent homes of the people of the areas mentioned above are within a walking distance and if they are allowed to do so by the armed forces they will happily get back home. Why Mr. Holmes is refusing to countenance this, cannot be understood this.

It is our duty to emphasize again that the LTTE is not holding the IDPs of the above mentioned villages as hostages, human shields or as camp followers. The people of the Vanni whom we are representing have free by their own free will chosen to live with the LTTE, suffer for it and follow the LTTE where those organizations lead them to. To put it more emphatically we have no inclination to separate ourselves from the LTTE. It is a canard shared by people like John Holmes that the Vanni people are held in the Vanni much against their will and or used as human fodder or as human shields or in the worst as a recruitment pool by the LTTE. We are living here on our free will and we lead our lives and beliefs in our own way. Our life and destiny is with the LTTE.

The world initially made a blatant error in keeping silent when the Sri Lanka government high handedly ordered the UN agencies, ICRC and INGOs to leave the Vanni within a stipulated date and leave the Vanni people to fend for them. We like to point out that the Medicine de-François is still functioning in

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the Darfur in spite of the Sudan government asking them to leave. In the instance of the Vanni all INGOs and UN agencies anticipated the order of the Sri Lankan government and fled with high speed from the Vanni where they should have stayed and served even at the risk of their own lives. This is a tragic commentary on the operation of the UN agencies and the INGOs in the Vanni. Sri Lanka has earned for itself a notorious reputation for the high degree of disappearances, killing of media personnel and a persistent refusal to allow the international observers to visit the affected areas to meet the affected people without the intervention of the government official.

People who cannot stand the daily bombing, shelling, and denial of food and medicine have wriggled in small numbers to areas controlled by the government. The manner in which they are being held by the government forces is a food for thought for the UN and its agencies. We are reliably informed that the men, women and children held separately in tightly controlled camps and thus the families are held separately. Again we are reliably informed that women are used as sex slaves and men as free labourers. In spite of the UN charter freedom of movement is denied to them. The cottages in which they are held are surrounded by barbed wires guarded by the army personnel and exit and entries are denied. We understand that some UN officials have visited these places in the company of army intelligence officials, government ministers and government people who made gestures in the back ground to the affected people not to speak too much to the visitors. We like to point out that the UN officials who visited the camps of Vavuniya did not bring their own reliable translators but depended on those provided by the government. In a much publicized instance a Muslim Minister who has accompanying UN official made an English translation diametrically opposed to a Tamil statement made by an internee of the Vavuniya Camp. This is the type of work which the UN nowadays is doing in our parts of the world. The UN has lost its youthful vigor which it had during its early days and officials now we are unhappy to say are time savers.

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We like to question under what section of the UN charter the so called welfare centers are operated by the government are dividing families into various sexes as men, women and children. Fathers are housed in different places, mothers in another and the children are separated both from the father and the mother. The male children are tortured for information and the female children are regularly sexually abused by the army officials. The woman who was abused nonstop for three days by the army personnel has already mentioned to AP press. We are informed that a good number of women had been transported to Anuradhapura and housed in government operated brothels for the horizontal pleasure of the army officials. It is high time for the UN woke up to its responsibilities and encourages INGOs to do investigation work where UN agencies have neither the time nor the inclination to do so.

The word 'welfare' used by the Sri Lankan government in connection with the centers it operates in various parts of the island is a misnomer. It evokes the memories of the concentration camps operated during the Boer war of the early part of the 20th Century and the Nazi concentration camps of the middle part of the same century. May we ask what is the use of rolls of barbed wires in a so called welfare centers. We also like to point out that man occupant of these welfare centers and the elderly woman of these welfare centers are forced to do free work for the military for which they do not get even a plate of extra food.

The government boasts that it has assigned safe zones which are also called and referred as free fire zones in the coastal areas of the Vanni which has already been mentioned. These are sandy wastes unfit for human habitation and in which no cultivation can be made. It is disease borne and the younger generation suffers the most. No man can live in this area for any period more than a week unless he has renounced hopes of the longer life. We like to bring to the attention of the International Community that a humanitarian intervention is compulsory to avoid a human disaster. In the age of the IT we fail to understand why the IC is unaware of this.

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What Mr. Holmes and his likes should know is that the so called free fire zones are so called only in names. These villages are daily under artillery fire, multi-barrel rocket attacks, white fertilizer bombs, mortar attacks, Kfir and Mig Bombers which makes it a lie of the government free fire zone. The government is making a wise move in limiting the number of people killed and injured daily in order to avoid the international outcry. In one instance the President of Sri Lanka made a very dangerous statement that if you wanted he would wipe out the entire people of the free fire zone in a matter of 24 hours and that he had not done so only out of pity. This type of barbarity has not been internationally publicized nor taken into account by high Mandarins of the UN. The people in this so called free fire zone are forced to live in deep underground trenches, bunkers, mud holes dug deep into sandy soils to avoid the lethal missiles directed by the army towards the 4 villages named above. In spite of that death rate and injury rate continues. These reminds the days of the Vietnam War when people live in and around DMZ had lead their lives underground. We are sure that Mr. John Holmes would have heard this aspect of the Vietnam War. If the international community has sense of comparative history and misery people living under war condition it would not have permitted the Vanni situation to continue.

In conclusion we like to conclude only a few words of learned Professor Dr. Boyle who is an expert in International Law and a professor of University of Illinois College of Law who has this to say "The GOSL Defense Minister Rajapaksa has determined that this entire area now inhabited by 350,000 Tamils is nothing more than a free fire-zone in violation of the most fundamental requirements of International Humanitarian Law. The GOSL defense minister has ordered all doctors and medical personnel out of Vanni on pain of being murdered by the GOSL army, including the International Committee of the Red Cross. The GOSL defense minister has also compiled a death list of Tamil civilians to be massacred in Vanni. If the states of the world do not act

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immediately and effectively to stop GOSL, they will soon be witnessing serial massacres of Tamils along the lines of Srebrenica, Sabra and Shatilla, Rwanda, and Kosovo.”

(Readers who are anxious to read Prof. Boyle in full please visit the website

<http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=28686>)

Thanking You,


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Dr. Nithyanantha Sharma
President


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Kopalakrishnan M.A.
Secretary