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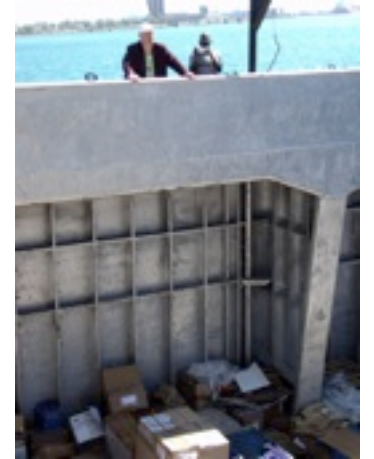
17 May 2009

VANANGAMAN - Mercy Mission to Vanni Ship En Route to Sri Lanka

At 2200h (French Summer Time UTC +2) on 7 May 2009 the Mercy Mission ship, "**Captain Ali**" (IMO: 6619920) set sail from Fos-Sur-Mer, France on the 2nd leg of the "**Mercy Mission to Vanni**". The *Captain Ali* is carrying approximately **884 metric tons** of food, medicine, and other essential humanitarian relief items destined for the 330,000 Tamil civilians in the Vanni area of Northern Sri Lanka displaced by the war. The "Mercy Mission to Vanni" began the 1st leg of its journey from the Port of Ipswich, UK on 20 April 2009. The *Captain Ali* has just entered the Red Sea after traveling through the Suez Canal.

An ex-Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) monitor, doctors, and humanitarian workers are traveling with the humanitarian relief on board the *Captain Ali*.

The ex-SLMM monitor Mr. Kristjan Guðmundsson, from Iceland, was an SLMM Naval monitor for one year (2003-2004) in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. He worked mainly on board Sri Lanka Navy vessels and also with the 'Sea Tigers'. In 2007, he returned to Sri Lanka and was the "Head of the Liaison Office" in Kilinochchi (LTTE Peace Secretariat Liaison) for 6



Kristjan Guðmundsson
(ex-SLMM / "Mercy Mission" Monitor)



Kristjan
Guðmundsson
checking boxes at
French "Vanni
Mission" Warehouse

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months after which he relocated to Jaffna where he reopened and headed the SLMM Jaffna Office until the SLMM left the country. Mr. Guðmundsson has been more or less 'at sea' since he was a young man. He is a ship captain "without limitation" and can captain a ship of any size.

Mr Guðmundsson's stated role as part of the "Mercy Mission" is to monitor the loading of the ship and the ship's journey to Sri Lanka in order to ensure that there is **total transparency** and that the "Mercy Mission" is

purely humanitarian. During the loading of the ship he remained on board 24 hours a day and he will remain on board the ship until it reaches the international waters off the coast of Vanni, Sri Lanka. After gaining permission to enter Sri Lanka waters, Mr. Guðmundsson will also monitor the unloading and distribution of the humanitarian aid. *(Please visit www.vannimission.org for video interviews with Mr. Guðmundsson aboard the Captain Ali)*

The ship has been equipped with an internet satellite facility and Mr. Guðmundsson, the doctors, and humanitarian workers will be filing daily video blogs, photo essays, personal reflections and twice daily reports (depending on the weather and connectivity) of this historic "**Mercy Mission to Vanni**". These reports as well as video and photos of the entire mission from beginning to end will be available on the mission website (www.vannimission.org), Facebook (Group name - **Vananga Man: Mission to Vanni**), Twitter (**vannimission**) and on a variety of mainstream media. The website will also have a realtime map showing the progress of the ship.



International Tamil Diaspora Mobilizes

In an unprecedented show of unity the international Tamil Diaspora has come together to collect and send this humanitarian relief to the 330,000 Tamil civilians displaced by the war. There are varying reports of the number of killed and injured with UN internal documents released in mid-April putting the figure at approximately 6,500 dead and 13,000 injured (reputable sources state that the final number may be 2 to 3 times this number) since the beginning



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of 2009 due starvation, bombing and shelling. The United Nations and the international Non-Governmental Organizations (iNGOs) have not been present in the so-called 'safe zone' since September 2008 and adequate amounts of humanitarian relief have not reached the civilian population for the last 18 months.

Thousands of first, second and third generation Tamil Diaspora volunteers in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Norway, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and the United States have worked closely together to conceive, plan and implement this "Mercy Mission to Vanni" (Vanangaman). It is a show of solidarity and concern by the worldwide Tamil Diaspora for their friends, relatives and fellow Tamils in the Vanni.



"Sea Ruby" at the Port of Ipswich, UK (20 April 2009)

The project has faced numerous hurdles, delays, interference and intimidation since its conception. On 20 April 2009 the ship, '**Sea Ruby**' (IMO: 9006447), with approximately **450 metric tons** of food, medicine and medical supplies collected in the UK, Germany and Norway departed Ipswich Port in the United Kingdom. British Customs thoroughly checked and x-rayed the boxes and pallets and certified the cargo, which was then taken to Fecamp, France.

From Fecamp, the UK humanitarian relief was taken by road to Fos-Sur-Mer Port, where it was joined by approximately **434 metric tons** of humanitarian assistance collected by Tamils in France from the Tamil

Diasporas in Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Switzerland and other European countries.

The international Tamil Diaspora has also supported the *Vanangaman* Mercy Mission to Vanni by donating funds via the internet (www.vannimission.org) and at various functions in Canada, Australia, USA, Malaysia, India, Singapore, and several other countries.

In addition to the Tamil Diaspora, over 20 Members of the UK Parliament and British celebrities, including Joanna Lumley, have signed a petition to the Government of Sri Lanka and the International Community requesting that the "Mercy Mission" be permitted to deliver its humanitarian cargo to the internally displaced persons.

International recording star and multimedia artist Maya Arulpragasam (M.I.A), also provided the "Mercy Mission" with a statement of support. (<http://vannimission.org/2009/03/31/statement-from-mia/>)



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Vanangaman - Mercy Mission to Vanni is organized by a Coordinating Committee consisting of European Tamil charities and community organizations, which include: Mission Vanni (France), Vanni Mission (UK), White Pigeon, Tamil Health Organisation (THO), Tamil Aid, Tamil Schools Sports Association (TSSA), Technical Association of Tamils (TAOT), The Tamil Support Foundation (TTSF) and the British organization "Act Now".

Operation Vanangaman is the largest response to a humanitarian crisis by the the Tamil Diaspora since the response in the aftermath of December 2004 Tsunami.



The worldwide Tamil Diaspora has showed their support for the "Mercy Mission" by donating funds online via the mission's website: <http://www.vannimission.org>



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