



Tamil Information Centre

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Committed to Human Rights and Community Development

PRESS RELEASE

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TIC urges the Sri Lankan government to lift restriction on TRO funds

The Tamil Information Centre (TIC) is disturbed by the Sri Lankan government decision to freeze the accounts of Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), from 29 August 2006. The TRO is a registered charity in Sri Lanka.

The TIC is aware that the government has accused the TRO of LTTE links, but up to now the government has not produced evidence that the funds of the TRO in Sri Lanka have been used for purposes other than humanitarian work. The government must recognize the essential humanitarian work that the TRO is carrying out in areas controlled by the LTTE, of its own and in partnership with local and international relief and developmental agencies, including UN bodies. These local and international agencies have recognized the vital task the TRO is performing in these areas for many years.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka, had not issued an official notice to the TRO about the freezing of the funds, but in its press statement on 4 September 2006 alleges that persons connected with the TRO have been arrested recently in various parts of the world. The TRO says that this is a spurious allegation and that no TRO officer has been arrested.

In its communication dated 4 September 2006, the TRO says that the government has not provided any reasons to the TRO for this drastic action of freezing the funds. The TRO also says that since registration as a charity, it had responded to all requests for financial and project information from government ministries and the Parliamentary Select Committee on NGOs, promptly and exhaustively.

In this light, and the fact that the TRO has provided relief to the people of the northeast for many years, it is clear that the intention of the present action is to exploit the critical humanitarian situation in LTTE-controlled areas and to pressure the civilian populations in these areas to submit to the will of the government. The TIC notes that humanitarian aid has become a weapon in the government's arsenal. The government's deliberate linking of humanitarian aid and military operations is a collective punishment on the people in LTTE areas, most of whom are suffering without basic needs such as food, shelter and medicines, because the government has willfully neglected to provide adequate assistance and has deliberately denied the establishment of institutional structures for the purpose of war and tsunami recovery operations. There is no doubt that their situation will further deteriorate without the humanitarian operations of the TRO.

The Sri Lankan government is creating an intolerable situation precipitating a humanitarian crisis, whereas its primary duty should be to provide relief and alleviate the sufferings of the people. Rather than taking steps to marginalize the organisation, which has access to government-controlled and LTTE-controlled areas, it would be beneficial to all, if the government can utilize TRO's good offices to narrow the gap between itself and the LTTE towards achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The TIC urges the government to refrain from exploiting the humanitarian situation in the northeast and lift the restriction on the funds of the TRO and provide the necessary assistance to deal with the humanitarian situation in the northeast.

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