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Committed to Human Rights and Community
Development

SITUATION REPORT-NO.4

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Heavy rain and stiff resistance by the Little are reported to have made army's advance difficult in Jaffna from 3rd to 9th November. The army resumed operations on 10th and the offensive continues. There has been a temporary halt in the military offensive on 16th November. The troops are now stationed one kilometer away from the northern suburbs of Nallur and Thirunelvely Junction. Reports from the East suggest that LTTE is planning a major offensive on Batticaloa town before the Sri Lankan military enter Jaffna town. Reports from Jaffna indicate that small groups of LTTE card have penetrated army-captured areas and planted mines causing heavy damage to the military.

People displaced from Jaffna continue to cross over to Vanni. Nearly 2,500 families are living in welfare centres and another 12,000 with friends or in public places in Kilinochchi district. Around 900 families have been accommodated in welfare centres in Mullaitivu District and around 6000 families are living outside. Thus in Vanni the number of people living outside is high and they are vulnerable.

The relief situation continues to cause concern to the relief workers, NGOs and the government agent of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya. The government continues to cause difficulties for relief to reach the people. Though UNHCR has managed to get across some supplies through Vavuniya, TIC has received reports that the army is causing

problems to move supplies. Mr. Jock Backer and Bernard Doyle, the two UNHCR representatives from Geneva were denied travel permits to Vanni. Meanwhile, the ICRC has planned to bring in a water and sanitation engineer to assist in their operations. The ICRC also had received £250,000

from the UK Overseas Development Agency. The also have received funds from the German government. The ICRC has refused to engage in the distribution of food in the peninsula. In the Vanni the ICRC now wish to only concentrate on the medical support.

The Sri Lankan government was outraged by the statement of Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, UN Secretary on General on 3 November 1995 expressing concern over humanitarian relief assistance needed on a significant scale to minimise the suffering of the affected Tamil population in Sri Lanka. The earlier attack on the UN by the Foreign minister had led to deterioration of relations between the government and International NGOs and other agencies. The Sri Lankan press had become increasingly critical of the actions of the NGOs. It has been alleged that the NGOs are capitalising on the plight of refugees to raise funds and that they are distorting facts about the plight of civilians which is tarnishing the image of Sri Lanka and intentionally or otherwise playing into the hands of the LTTE. The NGO are also accused of funding the LTTE. Over 3,000 protesters including Buddhist priests staged a protest at the Bentota Beach hotel where the NGO Forum on Sri Lanka had planned to have its Annual general Meeting on 15 November. Two NGO representatives from Germany were attacked and injured. They were not allowed to have their meeting on the 16th as well.

The government is desperate to contest the figure of 400,000 displaced announced by the Jaffna Government Agent on 7 November and argues only 100,000 had been displaced. As at 16 November 1995 several reports and assessments by independent agencies remain consistent that up to 500,000 people have been displaced. It has been reported that shelter, non-food items such as clothing and household items and water and sanitation are the urgent needs than large-scale food supplies. Independent reports received by TIC say that the kind of situation like Somalia and Rwanda have not developed, but the displaced people however are said to be suffering. Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions are creating a serious threat to health. The worst affected are the children, and the relief workers say that significant relief supplies are needed urgently to alleviate suffering and avert an increase of disease of children and the elderly.

The Tamil parties in Colombo also have expressed their concern over conditions of the civilians in the North and have called for international humanitarian agencies to be allowed to provide relief assistance.

The government also had quickly stepped up its propaganda to hoodwink the international community that it is honouring its international obligations. TIC sources say since 28th October no lorries with food chartered by the government agents have been allowed to cross into the Vanni.

Whereas, recent government press reports say “massive stocks of food to North by sea and road”. Meanwhile, it was reported that the statements by the UN Secretary General had persuaded President Chandrika Kumaratunge, to issue directions to dispatch food medicine and shelter to

the displaced people in the North. The government however has stated that the relief operation would only be carried out under government control initiatives and it would not allow any NGOs or UN agencies to carry out any independent programmes. This means the security forces would

become a key element in the relief operations. The government has now asked the ICRC to facilitate and monitor the government’s relief operation.

The UN Resident Co-ordinator in Colombo was very cautious in his recent statement. He said while the UN has a mandate to respond to humanitarian needs, the situation in Jaffna did not warrant this at present, and that the UN only gets involved when the government is unable to handle a crisis.

Two priests Rev. Emmanuel Pius of Kilinochchi and S Jebanesan of Jaffna were arrested in Vavuniya for carrying large amount of money without declaring. Reports suggest there was no rule or practice to declare cash movements. The priests were accused of taking money for the LTTE. The police have fabricated accusation that they were also carrying banned items. Reports say six Jesuit priests were also arrested in Kandy.

The military had recently added blank writing and printing paper, vegetable oil, coconut oil soap, video cassettes, and films to the existing list of banned items.

There is also a general feeling among military and government’s circles that the LTTE this time could be defeated in the battle for Jaffna. In that light a major humanitarian operation would impede the military offensive and provide the LTTE with resources to continue the fight. This is another factor that is contributing to the hardening attitude of the governments and attempts to stall relief efforts.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

To urge the UN agencies and NGOs to supply experienced relief workers and materials to the affected areas.

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