

University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), Sri Lanka]

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Averting a Blood Spill in Batticaloa

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The LTTE is being challenged as never before. Its outmoded reliance on violence to maintain political control over a frightened and beleaguered population has worn thin. Tamil politicians, journalists and ordinary members of the public are openly defying the LTTE's blatant death threats, and more importantly, many are surviving. But the LTTE will not go down without a fight. It is up to all democratic forces – in Sri Lanka and in the international community -- to ensure that these dissident voices continue to be heard, and that the LTTE death squads are not allowed to carry out its leaders' murderous intentions. It is particularly critical that, whatever the outcome of the election, the UNF and the UPFA commit to work together towards a political solution and acknowledge the urgent need for that process to be one that promotes democratic plurality.

The LTTE (or LTTE(P), the main faction led by Prabhakaran) in its address to the cadres and divisional heads of the Batticaloa-based breakaway faction headed by Karuna, made a declaration of intent to kill, not just Karuna but anyone who supports him.

It has been decided to get rid of Karuna from the soil. Our cadres should comprehend Karuna's treachery and keep away from him. Anybody who opposed disciplinary action against Karuna will be considered a traitor to the Tamil national cause... Based on the understanding that all the cadres enrolled themselves in the movement accepting the leadership of Mr. Velupillai Prabaharan and that the parents entrusted their children on this basis, we request that the cadres who are with Karuna now, without knowing the truth, should abandon him. Our National Leader has granted them permission to... join their families. In spite of the above advice, if any of the cadres decide to arm in favour of Karuna, he/she would be deemed responsible for the consequences. The demise of such a cadre will not be with the honour of a martyr (TamilNet 25th Mar. 2004)

These are particularly chilling words when viewed against the historical backdrop of massacres, vendetta killings of soft targets and mass disappearances that have littered the LTTE's unfinished journey to sole representative status. The recent assassination attempts on Mr. Thiruchelvam of the Eastern University's academic staff and Batticaloa's Government agent Mr. Mounagurusamy evoke the spiralling murders of civilians the LTTE committed to prevent the Indian Army from restoring normality after it took control of Jaffna in 1987. We might recall the murder in 1989 of Mr. Panchalingam, GA Jaffna, whose crime was to hold town-planning meetings in Indian Army administered Jaffna. There too the LTTE viewed as treasonous (and therefore punishable by death) non-violent efforts to improve the welfare of the region that might benefit an opponent.

The civilians in the East have suffered terribly at the hands of government forces, especially from 1984 to 1992. But what they suffered at the hands of the LTTE apart from being numerically comparable was more tragic, ironical and left the deepest wounds. To the people (and often the LTTE cadres) of the East, these were utterly unwanted. When the LTTE massacred members of the Tamil group TELO in 1986, the LTTE leadership in Batticaloa opposed the action and appealed to the top leadership to take account of the vulnerability of Tamils in the East. Then too Prabhakaran removed his critic rather than addressing the complaint. In a move reminiscent of the LTTE now replacing the suspect Eastern leader Paduman of Trincomalee with a Northern henchman Sornam, in 1986 it sent the Jaffna-born Kumarappa to attack the TELO in Batticaloa. Early strains among Eastern leaders became evident when local LTTE-leader Kadavul left heartbroken. Another leader, Francis, already a broken man, died at the hands of the Indian Army in early 1988.

Ironically, the LTTE holds up Paramadeva of Batticaloa who died in action in 1982 as an early example of Eastern devotion to the LTTE leader. What they do not mention is that the LTTE treacherously murdered Paramadeva's brother Vasudeva of the PLOTE in 1987, following which the indignant mother of the deceased brothers stormed into the nearest LTTE office, pulled down the Tiger flag and ripped it to pieces.

The LTTE never thought twice about inflicting death on the people of the East for its own ends. In 1990 it contrived massive reprisals against Tamil civilians in the East by murdering hundreds of disarmed Sinhalese and Muslim policemen and massacring innocent Muslim civilians. It used the chaos to recruit cadres in the East to fight its northern battles. A third of the 429 (Report No.13) cadres who died in the Pooneryn attack of November 1993 were from the East.

The LTTE(P) leadership today cunningly advises Eastern cadres under Karuna to go home, playing on the deep anguish of their families. Going home is an option the cadres will not have whether in the LTTE(P) or the LTTE(K). Given the forcible methods of recruitment in both the North and the East particularly since September 2001, and the high rate of desertion, home leave has been almost entirely disallowed. It is such recruits who will be sacrificed in any internal bloodletting.

The LTTE knows no other way to deal with dissent other than through sheer brutality. Knowing this record the families of often very young cadres are torn between unpromising alternatives and their voices have never been heard. In 1986 the LTTE reached agreement with students in the University of Jaffna to call off their very effective protest over the student Vijitharan who was abducted by the LTTE. Once the students ended their protest and dispersed, the LTTE hunted the leaders, several of whom were eventually killed. The same

year it reached agreement with the PLOTE in Jaffna to disband itself. A number of its members were then arrested and killed over the coming years. The same fate befell members of the Theepori [\[1\]](#) and other Left groups who never actively opposed the LTTE.

Of particular relevance to the East was conscript Tamil National Army made up of youths who only wanted to go home when the Indian Army and allied Tamil groups abandoned them in 1989. The LTTE simply massacred them by the hundreds in the East, including 300 in Batticaloa town, whose corpses like refuse were carried away in municipal garbage trucks. These acts of infamy were incidentally carried out with arms and logistics provided by the Sri Lankan forces. The term 'treachery' in Tamil patriotic discourse is indeed used very selectively.

One should have no illusions about the fate that awaits the East should the LTTE(P) be allowed to carry out its threats implied in its statement quoted above. What is as worrying is the role that is being played by the international community. [\[Top\]](#)

The International Community

The Norwegians and the international community got involved in the peace process to advance peace. The SLMM was brought here to monitor adherence to the terms of the MoU. The MoU commits both sides to abide by international law. The Tokyo declaration made by the donor community in June 2003 was even more explicit in demanding the observance of human rights. Prabhakaran's declaration reflects a complete disregard for international law and human rights. And what do we have from the international community and the SLMM? Total silence.

This silence makes them the LTTE's passive accomplices, enabling the LTTE to carry out its brutal threats unhindered.

The SLMM has gone even further. They announced their pullout from Batticaloa saying that their mandate covered LTTE(P) and not LTTE(K). On the other hand, they claim to be acting under terms of the MoU when they escort LTTE reinforcements from the North into Mutur, thus aiding the LTTE(P)'s military measures against LTTE(K) and facilitating the repression of the local population in Mutur (whose sentiments about the Vanni leadership would be similar to those in Batticaloa). Is this monitoring the peace process or ushering in the peace of the grave?

The Mutur area is socially contiguous with Vaharai in Batticaloa. It has been economically pillaged by the LTTE and subject to persistent child conscription (see our reports from late 2001). The LTTE was also responsible for violence against local Muslims, escalating tensions between the Tamil and Muslim communities, ultimately to exploit Tamil fears. The LTTE replacing the Trincomalee commander and bringing in northerners speaks for itself.

The international community has abandoned Batticaloa and its people pretending that it is an internal problem in the LTTE because it seems simpler from a policy perspective. In fact it is a recipe for disaster. There is nothing polite or civilised about what the LTTE is doing. What is going on is far from a liberation group dealing with an internal problem through a political process involving democratic debate. Prabhakaran, in his faction's recent statement, makes it clear that there is no room for such a process in the LTTE. The disciplinary action the statement speaks of is unknown to civilised discourse. How the LTTE is cynically allowed to

interpret all agreements and norms to its own advantage, and use everything to its own benefit, is a sad comment on the international community's role in Sri Lanka. [\[Top\]](#)

Using Everything

It is becoming shamefully clearer by the day that behind a formal pretence that it is now party to a peace process and is cooperating with elections, the LTTE has been given a free run to strengthen its totalitarian grip. The TULF president Mr. Anandasangary in a recent interview given to TBC Radio described the impact of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in upholding the rights of the people:

Four white persons come here and talk about our rights and go away. They come and tell us not to deny the people in the LTTE-controlled Vanni their fundamental rights and their right to vote as enjoyed by the people of Europe. But the reality in Vanni is that the people have no fundamental rights. There is no political freedom, and political parties cannot function. The people have been kept as frogs in the well for 20 years and denied the right to know their candidates and options available to them...

This is another example of the international community's refusal to acknowledge an atrocious ground reality and in the name of democracy pushing for the LTTE to rig the electoral process using the block vote of people who would be collectively punished for voting for the wrong party.

In its bid to dislodge Karuna again, the LTTE is using similar strategies. These involve on the one hand the use of terror and on the other its peculiar interpretation of legal arrangements and the foibles of the international community. One aspect of the latter is the pullout of the SLMM from Batticaloa. [\[Top\]](#)

Dislodging Karuna

The LTTE has virtually succeeded in getting the international community to turn a blind eye to what it will do in Batticaloa-Amparai as an exercise in 'internal self-determination.' The international community has lost sight of the fact that there are people, including children, there who must be protected.

One cannot after all blame the LTTE (LTTE(P)) for not being plain about its intentions. The LTTE(P) knows that a military assault on LTTE(K) would be very costly, and it cannot be contemplated without neutralising the Sri Lankan Army which has a major presence in the area. LTTE spokesmen have repeatedly dropped dark hints that they would resort to war if the Government aids Karuna in any way, knowing that no new government would like to be blamed for an outbreak of war. The *TamilNet* editor's article in *The Daily Mirror* (25th March 04) gives further hints of how this line of avoiding war may be pushed to demand Karuna's head on a platter.

The *TamilNet* editor suggests that the Government will be asked to demonstrate its good faith by accommodating the LTTE(P), as the legal party to the MoU, having political offices in Batticaloa-Amparai under government protection. It is now open history that these LTTE political offices and LTTE's political work meant that scores of political activists were murdered, hundreds of children abducted and no shadow of independent political activity was allowed. Neither the SLMM nor the Government did anything meaningful to stop this. How

nice for the SLMM to become active in Batticaloa-Amparai once more to supervise, in terms of its mandate, the Sri Lankan Army's protection of dens of LTTE(P) hit squads! How much murkier could things get? [\[Top\]](#)

The Attacks on Eastern Intellectuals, Community Leaders and Activists

The hit squads are already active. Their purpose is to terrorise people from having any association with Karuna's administration, by targeting persons with a consciousness of regional identity, who have articulated a need for the region's upliftment. Acting university dean Thiruchelvam had worked many years for the protection of the region's environment and cultural identity. The two assassins, who came home after dark on 24th March, asked if his dog would bite. He bent down to hold his dog when the assassins fired. He was injured in the middle part of his body, but survived.

The GA Mounagurusamy, the first Eastern Tamil to become GA Batticaloa, had been associated with Karuna in development projects and is known to have expressed strong feelings about northerners keeping the region deprived. He was returning on the evening of 27th March after supervising voting arrangements for Vaharai, when two men on a motorcycle slowed down his car by coming in front of it at Sathurukondan and then drew parallel to the front passenger side. The pillion rider fired at Mounagurusamy. The GA's driver who had saved former GA Pathmanathan from a similar situation, quickly grabbed the injured man, thrust his head on his lap and drove at speed to Batticaloa Hospital. The GA, who had a bullet in his head and was bleeding from the nose and an ear, was soon airlifted to Colombo.

We learn that that targets are picked and the assassinations directed by LTTE intelligence men Ram, Yogaraja and Keerthi who fled from Batticaloa and are now with the LTTE(P) in the Vanni. They act through hit men who have been posted to urban locations including Batticaloa town, Chenkalady and Valaichenai.

These targeted assassinations also make the LTTE(P)'s scare tactics more effective in pushing parents to demand that the LTTE(K) release their children. The LTTE(P)'s calculation is that LTTE(K) would be weakened sufficiently for them to stage a bloody return reminiscent of 1989 when they were aided and abetted by the Sri Lankan forces. Another looming tragedy of Easterners killing Easterners for Northern bosses.

Is this what the international community came to accomplish? The LTTE is further making a mockery of the Tamil cause as it was long understood by targeting persons who feel for their region, culture and identity. Is this not what the Tamil cause was originally all about?

The LTTE(P) has made an open declaration of death threats that promises a bloodbath. Are the international community and the Sri Lankan government simply waiting for it to happen? [\[Top\]](#)

Playing Football with the North-East

The leading Southern contenders, the UNF and the UPFA are each portraying themselves as the more credible party to solve the ethnic problem. Both have shown in practice that they would sidestep the human rights situation in the North-East and play along with the international community by covering up abuses by the LTTE. The reality is that neither party alone can find a solution to the problem.

It is time to demand responsible actions by each of these parties in the context of escalating LTTE violations of the Tamil people's rights. Both parties must cooperate on the ethnic issues, regardless of the election's outcome; they must be prepared to invite the respective opposition to take an active role, one that is clearly defined. Both parties must agree to work together towards a political solution if the LTTE resumes war and refuses to abide by the MoU and other accepted international human rights norms. [\[Top\]](#)

The Real Challenge Today

The LTTE is in crisis and knows it well. It cannot politically control the important Mutur sector in Trincomalee, unless it can take back Batticaloa-Amparai. What Karuna says is true; the LTTE cannot be a conventional force again unless it has a large supply of military slaves from the East. For the first time the LTTE is being challenged politically as never before. Anandasangary leading an independent group in Jaffna at elections has placed LTTE(P) in a quandary. There finally seem to be some democratic openings within the Tamil community. For the first time anywhere, Tamil institutions have defied the LTTE's threats and survived. The London-based Tamil Broadcasting Corporation continued against many dire threats to close down and is now being widely heard in Sri Lanka through its link with the SLBC. For the first time, dissident voices and opinions are being heard throughout the North-East. There are renewed hopes of a democratic awakening for the Tamil people that must be preserved.

However one looks at it, engaging with Karuna as someone who controls a large fighting force cannot be avoided. Karuna does have a violent past, and one should have no illusions about him as an individual. The problems facing the people of Batticaloa-Amparai cannot however be resolved without engaging with him. It is true that children carrying arms under Karuna must go home. Not only these children, but also the children under LTTE(P). The parents never entrusted their children to Velupillai Prabhakaran as his statement claims, rather they have always wanted their children at home both in the East and the North. Our reports have clearly documented the utterly repugnant abduction of children by LTTE gangs in the East as well as the North and the UNICEF recently confirmed that it is still going on in the North. The current situation could result in a huge bloodbath of innocent children. In order to avoid this, the international community must step in and ensure that the differences within the LTTE should not be resolved by force.

Despite Karuna's past, he does not have the same ideological baggage as Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran cannot change, as seen in his most recent statement. All those trips and VIP tours given to LTTE leaders to European capitals to learn about democracy and federalism have only resulted in this recent horrendous statement. Karuna has a vested interest in showing that he could give the people of Batticaloa-Amparai a better deal than the Northern bosses. If the international community will take this opportunity to push him in that direction and see that the child soldiers are released, political killings cease and violence against Muslims is brought to an end, it will lead to major repercussions holding out hope for human rights in the North.

On the other hand, the present indifference of the international community cannot do any good. The LTTE(P)'s political killings open the way to the dreadful scenario we witnessed during the Indian Army's presence. People with political alignments and their families were targeted by all sides. The simple, but illusory, justification was that this is the only way they could protect their own families. This is a tragedy we cannot afford to repeat.

