



TAMIL WRITERS GUILD

26 July 2014

His Holiness Pope Francis PP,
Suite 201
The Domus Sanctae Marthae
Vatican City

Your Holiness,

The Tamil Writers Guild which is an organisation commenting on issues relating to the Tamils in Sri Lanka, have learned that your holiness is planning a visit to that once beautiful island. We have also been made aware of your recent audience with Sri Lankan politicians, arranged by the Bishops of Sri Lanka.

Your Holiness would have learned about the Sri Lankan war which climaxed in May 2009. The UN estimated that more than 100,000 civilians perished in the final stages of the war, with most resulting from the government forces' aerial bombing of the No Fire zones. Subsequently, around 325,000 Internally Displaced People were kept in temporary detention camps in appalling conditions, with over 100,000 IDPs still not settled in their own lands.

According to the SL government, the war has finished, yet the north and east of the island are still heavily occupied by the Army, with widespread aggression and ill treatment including rape and abductions allegedly rife in those areas.

When the British Prime Minister David Cameron visited the island in November 2013, he managed to visit the north although the Channel 4 journalists were stopped from visiting the north. Mr Cameron saw at first hand, the plight of the suffering people and demanded an Independent International Inquiry into the alleged genocide and gross violations of human rights.

In his address to the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee, the Catholic Bishop of Mannar Reverend Dr Rayappu Joseph has claimed that 146,679 people were still unaccounted for after the war. His report is well worth reading and it refers to the systemic extra judicial killings, abductions, and rapes, with many of those atrocities conducted in full view of the SL government's soldiers!

The Holy Bible says 'Healthy people don't need a doctor but sick people do'. In that context, it would be marvellous if your visit can bring about healing and understanding in general and within the Catholic community in particular – the latter, due to the alleged friction between the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholic Bishops.

At the other end of the spectrum, when justice is done eventually, the SL authorities may end up in the international criminal court. Your Holiness' audience and SL visit is most likely to be



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interpreted as approval and blessing to a regime which is clearly the subject of much international concern, especially given its open and hostile refutation of all such concerns.

Therefore, we would seek your urgent reconsideration of your planned visit to the island and if Your Holiness proceeds with that visit, we sincerely hope it will also include an open visit to the war ravaged northern Sri Lanka and one which will be free of any attempt to muzzle the local people's access to you.

We at the TWG wrote at least three letters to the Vatican during the final stages of the Sri Lankan war but we did not receive any response. We hope this time will be different.

Yours sincerely

R Von Rugen
For TWG Editorial Board

cc. (post to:)
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