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Rt Rev Dr Rowan Williams,
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Your recent comments on Sri Lanka – a second letter

Dear Archbishop,

I sent you a letter on 21 May 2007 which is on it's way to London with the DVDs which I have recorded to document the terrible suffering of the Tamil people in the North and East of Sri Lanka. I stress again that I am not from the Tamil community.

My letter to you was put on various international websites since I thought it in the public interest to do so. It was also to show the devastated Tamil people in Sri Lanka, who are not only devastated by Rajapakse's bombing but by your failure to unequivocally condemn it, that there are people, non-Tamils, who care about their suffering.

Global Public Response

I thought you would like to know that the global response that I have had has been overwhelming. I have had had some 40 emails and telephone calls, every one of them in support of what I had written. Some of them were from members of your own clergy, not all of them Sri Lankan Tamils, and most of them not recognized 'activists'. It is the largest number of emails I have had in response to any of the articles I have written on the Sri Lankan Ethnic problem and the suffering of the Tamil people. It shows the extent of the hurt your remarks have caused.

An "explanation"

Given the extent of the concerns, the very least you could have done was to have given some explanation, rather than leave it to others. It is inconceivable that you were unable to spare 10 minutes to write a two-line explanation of one outrageous sentence, or to submit an apology.

I note that the Bishops of Colombo and Kurunegala have attempted an 'explanation'. They have, in fact, made a bad situation worse.

Bishops de Chikera and Illangasinghe referred to the "misleading impression" of the "real stance" of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Although their letter is to the Editor of the Tamilnet, by extension it also applies to us, who have had similar "impressions" and have expressed our concerns to you. According to your Assistant Secretary, I am "one of a number" that have expressed concern

Do these two Bishops really feel that we are unable to decipher straightforward English, which has resulted in our ending up with “misleading impressions”? They say that the Tamilnet (and we, by extension) has “*singled out a sentence*” that you made without reference to the sentence that preceded it and the words that followed it.

The reference is to your words,

It is undoubtedly inevitable that what you might call “surgical” military action against terrorism should take place.

The sentence before and words that followed were:-

“The military solution to the problems of the country increasingly appear to be no solution. It is undoubtedly inevitable that what you might call “surgical” military action against terrorism should take place but we all hope and pray that it will lead not to desolation, victory for one and defeat for another, but to an opening of communication, a reestablishment of the possibility for civil societies to develop.”

In their letter to the Tamilnet, the two Bishops say that this is “*not an endorsement but rather an observation on the present reality in Sri Lanka*”.

An “observation”

An “observation” based on what? What did you ‘observe’ when you did not go anywhere near the area where there were things to ‘observe’ i.e. the devastation of Tamil civilian life, the extensive destruction of Tamil civilian property, some 400,000 refugees, the bombing of Churches and Hindu Kovils, hospitals, schools, orphanages and refugee camps.

Archbishop, you could not have ‘observed’ this from Colombo, Kurunegala or Kandy.

“should” and “will”

You said that “*military actionshould take place*”. Your two Bishops in Sri Lanka have converted this to “*government forces will react to attacks*”.

Archbishop, there is a problem with English, I mean the language. “Should” is an auxiliary verb which has an imperative, which “will” does not have. For example, “a country should look after its citizens,” is very different from “a country will look after its citizens”. I do not need to labour the point, except to say that your Bishops have no right to alter the sense of what you said, and attempt to blur the line between the two. That is dishonest

They offer no explanation, not even a weak one, for your comment that the military action was “*undoubtedly inevitable*”, your reference to “*surgical*” military action, or your extraordinary “hope” (and prayer!) that this military action “*will lead to.....an opening of communication, a re-establishment of the possibility of civil societies to develop*”.

“Undoubtedly inevitable”

Many of us who expressed our concerns to you are reasonably well-educated (in English). Speaking for myself, I was educated in two of your better universities, Cambridge and London. We are capable of interpreting straightforward English. “*Undoubtedly inevitable*” can mean only one thing – ‘undoubtedly inevitable’. There is no room for “*misleading impressions*”.

“Surgical” military action

What exactly did you mean? “Surgical” as of excision of, say, a tumour, or “surgical” by way of accuracy. What else **could it** mean?

If the former, are you saying that the attempts of the Tamil people to free themselves from Sinhala domination and oppression (for that is what this fight is all about) is something that must be surgically excised?

If the latter, are you referring to the bombing with pinpoint accuracy of places like the Sencholai orphanage? If so, may I draw your attention to the fact that it was the Government of Sri Lanka, not the Tamil people or the LTTE, who have done so? You may not know this, the pinpoint targeted bombing of the Sencholai orphanage with some 400 Tamil children by Kfir jets was possible because those who ran the orphanage had given the Sri Lanka Armed Forces the coordinates of the orphanage to prevent accidental bombing. Ironically, it was this information that was used by the Air Force to bomb the orphanage. That it was targeted was admitted by Keheliya Rambukwella, President Rajapakse’s Defence spokesman. Is that what you were referring to when you spoke of “surgical” military action?

“....to open lines of communication”

How can military action such as what is going on in Sri Lanka open lines of communication (presumably with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Are you suggesting that the LTTE be bombed to the negotiating table?

Is that what your country did with the Irish Republican Army (IRA)? Did your government take “surgical” military action to “open lines of communication” with the IRA? If your Government had adopted that course of action, your country would still be fighting the IRA.

Your Government banned the IRA. Then what? Then they found that they could not negotiate with “terrorists” Then what? The IRA was ‘de-banned’. Then what? Then they sat down and negotiated a peaceful settlement. How is it, or why is it, likely to be different in Sri Lanka?

What the current Government of Sri Lanka is pursuing is a cruder version of the ‘War for Peace’ strategy of the previous President Chandrika Kumaratunga who bombed parts of the Jaffna peninsula to rubble, and then bombed the rubble to dust.

“ re-establishmentfor civil society to develop”

How can military action (“surgical” or otherwise, “inevitable” or otherwise), establish anything but a violent society? Is that what you are advocating? What other interpretation is there?

Archbishop, there is already a cult of extreme violence developing both in the Tamil areas and the Sinhala areas. You do not need to facilitate this by making irresponsible comments.

Today, the problem in Sri Lanka, in addition to the ethnic conflict, is the collapse of civil society. Civil society has collapsed because of the establishment of a fascist dictatorship. These are problems you should have thought of before you made irresponsible and inflammatory statements about the “absolute”, “inevitable surgical military action” which should occur.

“While acknowledging that government forces would react to attacks...”

“Whilst acknowledging that government forces would react to attacks.....” states Rev. Antony Ball, your Secretary for International Ecumenical and Anglican Communion Affairs, in his letter sent to those who wrote to you.

From where does Rev. Ball get his information? Was it from the Sri Lankan Bishops who said the same thing? Archbishop, I am currently putting together a DVD for international release, copies of which will be delivered to your office, to show what arrant nonsense these people are talking.

Let me take you through just a **few** of the 25 massacres that have occurred in the past year. In not one of them were the civilians armed, let alone attacking the government forces.

On 26 December 2005, every fisherman on the beach in Pesalai, off Mannar, was shot by the Navy. The civilian population took shelter in The Lady of Victory Church. The navy shot the terrified refugees through the windows of the locked and barred Church, and then tossed a grenade into the Church. Bishop Rayappu Joseph will bear testimony, he saw this and much more. Did you meet him, Archbishop? It was more important to meet him than the Buddhist monks in Kandy.

On 2 January 2006, 8 students on a picnic to farewell one of their colleagues were made to lie on the ground and shot through their heads by the Special Task Force elite Police Unit initially trained by people from your country.

On 26th and 27th April 2006, the combined Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) bombed and shelled a civilian settlement in Muttur, also in Trincomalee.

On 13 May 2006, the Navy shot an entire Tamil family while they slept, one child was 4 years and the other an infant of 4 months. Do you think they were attacking the government forces?

On 6 June 2006, in Vankalai, a family, one of the poorest of the poor, was shot, the children were butchered and hanged in front of their parents who were then executed. Do you think they were about to blow up the Armed Forces?

On 5 August 2006, 17 Aid workers of the French NGO, Action against Hunger, were lined up and shot in their office in Trincomalee. The Nordic Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) said that this was a violation of the Ceasefire, Ulf Henricsson, the Head, describing this as “....*one of the most serious crimes against aid workers worldwide*”.

I have already alluded to the bombing of the orphanage. On 11 August 2006, the Sencholai orphanage with 400 children was targetted and bombed by Kfir jets, 51 children died on the spot, others died later. The SLMM, UNICEF and even the UN Special Rappateur for Children in Armed Conflict, stated that these were school children and were not being trained in the use of arms as the Government claimed. Archbishop, can you see that the government is lying?

On 16 December 2006, the Armed Forces shelled Kandalady Arunthathy school in Batticaloa, packed with 1,000 refugees. 41 died and the school was totally destroyed. Do you think the refugees were attacking the Armed Forces, and if so, pray, with what?

On 2 January 2007, yes, Archbishop, a few months before you visited Sri Lanka, the Air Force bombed Padahuthurai, a small fishing village in the North, as the entire village was celebrating the New Year. The dead included 8 children age 1-10. What if one of these was

your child? I guess *all* are, since, if you believe what you profess to believe, they are all God's children. Would you like their names? You could go to Padahuthurai, or what is left of it, and wipe the tears from the faces of the devastated people and say you are very sorry.

Archbishop, I can go on describing many more atrocities. I have the details. Is this what your Bishops in the Sinhala South and Rev. Antony Ball in your office, claim to be government forces reacting to attacks? If they are, they are distancing themselves from reality.

A basic question for you

Archbishop, can you see, even at this late stage, that you are being manipulated by those with an agenda? You are being manipulated to come to the assistance of a brutal, barbaric, irresponsible Government which has decided to decimate the Tamil people in the North and East to force them to accept Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist nation.

I am not absolving you from the responsibility of making inflammatory comments, but I hold your Bishops in Colombo and Kurunegala equally responsible.

You did not fix your itinerary in Sri Lanka. You left that in the hands of your hosts. I hold them responsible for the sins of omission (for the omission of not visiting starving and besieged Jaffna and the devastated East), and of commission (committing your short stay to things that do not matter e.g. having a party in the President's home, or even your visit to Kandy, when the need of the hour was a visit to Jaffna, Batticaloa and Trincomalee).

The pain the news reports have caused

Rev. Ball concludes his letter to the editor of Tamilnet asking that he gives "*adequate publicity to this statement of clarification*" which "*will also address the pain that the news report has caused*".

I draw the attention of Rev. Ball to the fact that the pain caused by the news report of what you said, is infinitesimally small compared to the pain, both mental and physical, caused to the Tamil people in the North and East, by your flippant remarks which have still not been withdrawn, as they should have been several weeks ago.

The Tamilnet

What I found amusing was that the "explanation" offered by the Bishops of Colombo and Kurunegala, was sent to, of all places, the Tamilnet. Archbishop, you may not know this, the Tamilnet is widely known as a strong supporter of the Tamil Tigers whom you anonymously, but recognizably, refer to as "terrorists".

We now have the absurd situation of your Bishops in Sri Lanka urging a network sympathetic to 'terrorists', to spread their 'explanation'. Would it not have been more appropriate for them to have taken their 'explanation' to President Rajapakse, and to have got him to air it in the Government-controlled Media, so that the Tamils in the North and the East, who are those who will be adversely affected by your comments, will see it? I suspect that the Bishops would not dare to displease the Sinhala chauvinists who are currently celebrating your comment.

An apology, not a ridiculous 'explanation'

Archbishop, what was necessary was an apology to the Tamil people in the North and East rather than a stupid 'explanation' by your two Bishops in the Sinhalese South. I hope and

pray that the expatriate Tamil community, and all concerned people, will continue to write to your office with their concerns. Sending me appreciative emails is not a substitute.

In my earlier letter, I referred to the Anglican Bishop of Kurunegala, the late Rt Rev Lakshman Wickremesinghe, visiting the refugee camps after the slaughter of some 3,000 Tamil civilians in Colombo in 1983. The ailing Bishop was not even in the country when this massacre occurred. He hurried back to Sri Lanka to be with people who were not even his flock. He visited the refugee camps in Colombo, and, as I said in my earlier letter, was found crying in the camps.

I recently met a person who was in one of these camps. He told me that Bishop Lakshman's act helped soothe, to a great extent, the pain and sorrow felt by many Tamils. Bishop Lakshman went on to speak of the collective guilt he felt as a Sinhalese, and said that we, the Sinhalese, should apologise to the Tamils for what was done to them. That is a true Christian.

Foreigners 'jetting' into Colombo'

The problem of foreigners 'jetting' into Colombo, making inflammatory statements and jetting out, has become a major problem. Here are some examples.

Ashley Wills, took up his appointment on 27 September 2000 as the American Ambassador in Colombo,. In less than 6 months, on 7 March 2001, he addressed the Tamils in the North in the Jaffna Public library, telling them that "... *the goal of Tamil Eelam (a separate Tamil State) cannot be achieved*" and that "*The United States rejects the idea of an Independent Tamil State*". Here is a man who had just arrived in the country and in less than 6 months had the answer to an ethnic problem that had gone on for half a century! It is breathtaking arrogance. The Tamils did not ask for his opinion and advice. Wills does not have to suffer the brutality of the Colombo regime.

On 23 January 2006, US Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, 'dropped in' on his way to Islamabad, had a "*wonderful lunch*" (his words), courtesy of the impoverished taxpayer, and then, 'sang for his supper' by supporting the irresponsible and brutal Sri Lanka Government. Then he jetted out.

On January 9, 2006, US Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead, addressed the American Chamber of Commerce on "*Peace and Prosperity: US Policy Goals in Sri Lanka 2006*". With the Sri Lankan economy in crisis (because of escalating military expenditure), Lunstead said that he had "*.....some potentially good economic news recently from the (Sri Lankan) Central Bank....*"

It might have been "good economic news" to a country selling weapons to Sri Lanka, but bad news for Sri Lankans facing a serious budget deficit, which had gone from Rs 168 billion in 2005 to Rs 91 billion in 2006, because the allocation for 'Defense' (for Sri Lanka to defend itself from its own people), had gone up nearly 50% from Rs 56.6 billion in 2005 to Rs 91.6 billion in 2006. (It is much higher now, and will get up to Rs 200 billion this year – 2007, with the budget deficit Rs 235 billion, and inflation 19%.)

"Free Speech" is not the freedom to say anything you want, to anyone you want, anywhere you want, irrespective of the consequences – intended or not. There are, or should be, moral and ethical restraints. If the line between responsible comment and irresponsible and inflammatory comment is crossed, then it must be challenged by civil society. This is particularly important where the comments generate, or can be used to generate, civil strife, violence, bloodshed, the violation of basic human rights.

Back to Sri Lanka

Many shocked Tamils have written to me saying, "Let us pray that this man never goes to Sri Lanka again". I disagree, and pray that you will go, not "in passing", but on a specific, 'targetted' visit as soon as possible, to undo the damage you have done.

I suggest you go back to Sri Lanka now, go and stand with my Tamil people in the North and East, wipe the tears that are streaming down, go to the East and stand with my Tamil and my Muslim people in the refugee camps and challenge the Sri Lankan Armed Forces to bomb them (and you), go to the rural areas in the South and stand with my Sinhalese people and help them to bury the dead Sinhalese soldiers who are fighting (and dying) in the Armed Forces because they have no other way of earning a living. As I said in my earlier letter, that is what my God (and yours) would have done.

That would be the way to restore your shattered image and, what is more important, the shattered image of my Church, the Anglican Church, whose head you are. It would also send a strong image to the Government that the Christian Church, your Church and mine, is totally opposed to this mass slaughter of civilians and the pursuit of a military solution to a political problem.

Praying, alone, is not enough.

Yours sincerely

Brian Senewiratne