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Tamil Eelam

Sri Lanka and the “international community”

- IV Online magazine - 2009 - IV412 - May 2009 -

Publication date: Wednesday 3 June 2009

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On Sunday May 17, 2009 the Sri Lankan army stated that it had evacuated all remaining civilians trapped in the area of its offensive against the Tamil Tigers. The Tamil separatists who had taken refuge on a strip of land of around 1km² have for their part admitted their military defeat and laid down their arms.

Since no humanitarian organisations or journalists were allowed to stay in the zone, it is absolutely impossible to confirm this information. It is perhaps the end of an extremely bloody offensive, which has gone on for several months and during which the government, in its “anti-terrorist” war, has shown no great concern for the civilians trapped in the crossfire of the army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The army has not hesitated since the beginning of operations to bomb hospitals, schools and even the safety area that it had itself marked out. Several thousand civilians have died since the beginning of the year and there are at least 17,000 wounded.

Despite repeated violations of international agreements and the multiplication of war crimes, the Rajapaksa regime has never felt threatened by the “international community”. No diplomatic initiative has succeeded in obtaining from the government a ceasefire which would have allowed aid to reach the thousands of wounded and civilians trapped in the combat zone where there is nothing to eat, no medicines and no shelter to protect them. The UN has spoken of a “bloodbath” but was content with calling for “restraint”. Its spokesperson said “we are happy to learn that all civilians have got out of the combat zones” accepting the government version despite the total lack of objectivity.

The hypocrisy has no limits. Thus in a press release, the UN security advisor firmly condemned the LTTE for their acts of terrorism and asked them to surrender while only expressing “concerns” about the use of heavy artillery by the Sri Lankan army in an area where Tamil civilians were concentrated. The US State department spokesperson, Ian Kelly said that the number of civilian victims had reached an “unacceptable” level. It would be good to know what number of civilian victims was acceptable to the international community!

Inside the UN Security Council, Russia and China have blocked any possible action. For Russia, the Sri Lankan war is an internal affair that the government should settle as it deems appropriate. The lack of compassion on the part of a country which did not hesitate to kill 300 civilians in Beslan in its Chechen “war on terror” is hardly surprising.

China has defended the principle shared by Asian countries of “non interference” in the “internal affairs” of neighbouring countries. Beijing thus reinforces its economic and political interests in the region. A big energy user, China has sought for several years to develop port and road infrastructures in neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma, allowing it to safely import Middle Eastern oil. Since 2007 China has been building a deep water port in the south of Sri Lanka at Hambantota.

This Chinese undertaking has annoyed its rival in the region, India. Sri Lanka forms part of India’s “area of influence” in terms of its geostrategic and economic interests. For example, after the government offensive against the LTTE in 2006, the Sri Lankan army destroyed houses in the region of Sampoor and evacuated its inhabitants (in their majority Tamil) to make room for the construction by the Indians of a thermal power plant. New Delhi did not wish to annoy Colombo and was well satisfied with a pacified country whatever the price to be paid in terms of human lives.

The war against the Tamil rebellion in the north of the island has put in place an autocratic and dictatorial regime which has launched its death squads against dissonant voices and repressed independent journalists (intimidations, kidnappings, arbitrary detentions, assassinations). No political stability will emerge in the country as long as the inalienable rights of minorities are not recognised and the democratic liberties of all, independently of their ethnic

origin, are suppressed.