

## The silent suffering of Sri Lanka's Tamils

Roy Ratnavel, National Post



In May of this year, during the final stages of a brutal ethnic civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government, a so-called "humanitarian rescue" of civilians was undertaken by Sri Lanka's armed forces. More than 20,000 Tamil civilians trapped in the conflict zone were massacred.

Thousands of dead are children, and most of them died before they even knew that they were Tamils. Scores of people died in bunkers, or were burned alive and bombed in open spaces. People were also shot at close range by the Sri Lankan army. Sri Lanka had no qualms about using heavy weapons to bombard the very people it claimed to be rescuing. According to some reports, the army even used illegal chemical weapons.

The survivors -- many of them maimed and malnourished -- were sent to government-run Tamil "welfare villages," which for some proved to be extermination camps. For survivors, it seems there can be no closure, no dignity, no respect. Many remain effectively as prisoners -- cut off from the outside world and, in some cases, subjected to torture, summary execution and starvation. About 1,400 people are believed to be dying every week, and some girls and women have become pregnant due to rape. Even some of the doctors treating the sick and wounded in the conflict zone were not spared.

Through such acts, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother, Defence Minister Gotabaya Rajapaksa, joined the ranks of infamous national leaders who have resorted to slaughtering their own people. As with Slobodan Milosevic, the evidence demonstrates that they possess a murderous hatred toward a specific ethnic group.

The scale of the humanitarian tragedy in Sri Lanka is hard to fathom for us diaspora Tamils looking on from so many miles away. With the military offensive now over and the Tamils behind barbed wires, we would like to ask just one question: Is the world happy with the outcome?

Despite this grim scenario for Tamils, Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority celebrated the war's end with fireworks and parties as if they'd just won a cricket championship -- hardly a sign that accommodation and reconciliation toward Tamils is in the offing.

We told the world, contrary to Sri Lankan government claims, that the safe zones would be anything but safe. But the world did not listen. Words uttered by the world in unison -- "never again" -- after similar horrors in Europe and Africa have proven to be mere words. Sri Lanka must be called to account for its actions. If that doesn't happen, then the world is responsible. As Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel recently stated: "Wherever minorities are being persecuted we must raise our voices to protest. According to reliable sources, the

Tamil people are being disenfranchised and victimized by the Sri Lanka authorities. This injustice must stop. The Tamil people must be allowed to live in peace and flourish in their homeland."

Tamil people deserve to be heard by the international community as the pendulum of oppression has clearly moved against them. We hope the world won't wait until the Museum of Human Rights curates a history of the persecution of Tamils to tell the their story. roy\_ratnavel@ hotmail.com

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