

## **MUSLIM LAND RIGHTS AND SECURITY QUESTION IN THE NORTH - EAST**

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has had a terrible effect on the Muslims. In the South, Muslims have been victims of riots and pogroms. In the North East the forcible eviction of more than one hundred thousand Muslims, the attacks on the mosques and other places of worship, the confiscation of land and attacks on innocent civilians has caused fear and insecurity in the hearts of the Muslims.

Even after the ceasefire agreement, the Muslims have been denied access to mosques during mass agitation promoted by the LTTE. Further, the incidents at Muttur and Valachenai during June 2002 where the LTTE and other Tamil militarists have destroyed properties worth more than 150 Millions and abducted and killed 13 Muslims. Last week 11 Muslims have been brutally murdered by the Tamils in the Government controlled area - the predominant Muslim area kinniya in Trincomalee District. The Tamils Terrorists here has the advantages of the arms and annunciations. It seems that the LTTE has no control over these Tamil terrorists known as "Tamil maravar padai" – supposed to be the unidentified "third force"

Ground situation to-day in Jaffna is quit different. Before the ethnic cleansing in October 1990 the Muslims have been engaged on pavement hawking, tailoring, meat stalls and scrap iron business. But the LTTE middlemen have now taken control of the trade and it is extremely difficult for the Muslims to survive in Jaffna. Also the Muslim returnees have found that their houses are being unlawfully occupied by the Tamils supported by the LTTE. The Tamils insist the Sri Lanka armed forces to vacate the high security areas where the LTTE refusing to vacate the Muslim lands and properties unlawfully occupied in the North-East.

The land rights question is one of the most critical issues which are obstructing peace and reconciliation between the Tamil and Muslim people in the North East of Sri Lanka. At the second meeting of the peace talks in Thailand between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the LTTE has announced that they would be interested in returning the lands and the properties to the owners after harvest and wanted a register identifying the Muslim claims. There are nearly 490 locations in the North East where the Tamils are

unlawfully occupying more than 100,000 acres of agricultural lands belonging to 30,000 Muslim Families.

Hon. Rauff Hakeem had requested the Muslim Rights Organisation to prepare the register of lands and properties that are being forcibly occupied by the Tamils in the North-East.

The resolution of the land and properties question would be of enormous significance and will establish the basis for reconciliation and co-existence. It will remove one of the worst wounds, which is at the heart of the relations between the Tamil and Muslim communities in the area of conflict.

The Foundation for Co-existence has created the base framework providing consultancy support and strategic planning and continue monitoring and evaluating of the project and create a broader understanding for mediation and alternate disputes resolution and seek the involvement of all stakeholders.

Registration of Muslim Lands and Properties forcibly occupied by the Tamils in the Eastern Province is funded by USAID/OTI - commenced from 24th April 2003. Beneficiaries 20,000 families and 100,000 people. 42 field officers were employed in all the three districts in the Eastern Province – Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee to collect the necessary detail informations and supporting documents from 20,000 families. Field work is over and the final register is completed. Thanks to USAID/OTI

On a decision at the 5th session of the peace talks in Berlin on 7th & 8th of February 2003, LTTE – Muslim District Committees were established in all the three districts in the Eastern Province by the Government Peace Secretariat under the Prime Minister, to mediate lands and properties issues between the Tamils and Muslims. The committees were successful in resolving many issues and obtained the assurance from the LTTE local leaders for the release of nearly 30,000 acres and properties registered.

Unlawful occupation of Muslim lands, abduction of Muslims for ransom, and taxation by the Tamil terrorists are the root causes for the ethnic conflict between the Tamils and Muslims in the North-East. Clear example is the recent violence in Kinniya a predominant Muslim area 146 sq. km in the Government controlled area, 16 Kilometres down South of Trincomalee Town where 70,000 Muslims – 95% and 3,500

Tamils – 5% live. Tamil terrorists are forcibly occupying Muslim lands in Kinniya, Muthur, Thampalakamam, Kanthalai, Kuchcheveli and Pudavaikattu. Abduction and Taxation- Rs. 300/- per cattle, Rs. 500/- per acre of Paddy land per season, Rs. 10-15,000/- per tractor and trailer, Rs. 750/- per cart to collect fire wood. Tamil terrorists have robbed a heard of 75 cattle at Wan Ela area, two weeks ago. The abducted Muslim owner not released yet. Tamil terrorists are demanding Rs. 100,000/- as ransom. The atrocities caused by the gun carrying Tamil terrorists in the Government controlled areas after the cease fire agreement has become unbearable for the Muslims in Trincomalee. The Government security forces, Norwegian nominated Sri Lanka Monitoring Missions – SLMM, the three Muslim Parliamentarians from Kinniya, the Civil Administrators – G.A. and the Divisional Secretariat DS have done very little to protect the unarmed Muslim community in the cleaned area after the Cease Fire Agreement - CFA. The media continue to publish false reports supporting the Tamil terrorists saying that an unidentified "Third party" involvement in the conflict. The so called sole representative of the Tamils - the LTTE continue to disclaim the responsibility for the atrocities caused by the Tamil terrorists identified as "Tamil Maravar Padai"

As a protest the Muslims in Kinniya staged a peaceful harthal on 23rd October 2003. The Tamil terrorists considered this harthal by the Muslims was to disturb the "Thipaveli" a Tamil festival the following day 24th October 2003 and publicly threatened to disturb the Muslim festival "Ramazan" on the 25th November 2003.

On 23rd November 2003 the day before the Ramazan festival, the Tamil terrorists entered the Muslim village with guns and grenades and killed M. Nasrudeen (30) and injured M. Jamaldeen (51) and A.S. Jumkan (26) at 7.45 p.m. at Faizal Nagar. A cadjan hut was destroyed value Rs. 10,000/-

On 24th November 2003, grenade attack by the Tamil terrorists on a lorry carrying vegetable from Dambulla at 2.30 a.m. at Kachchakudithievu and killed I. Nazrudeen (40) and Abdul Azam (26) and seriously injured M.S. Hadayethulla (27) and N.M. Majed (32). Damage Rs. 100,000/-.

On 28th November 2003, the Tamil terrorists attacked the Muslim farmers with grenade at 5.00 p.m. at Neduloothu and hacked to death three Muslims A.M. Subair (56), A.M. Hassan (60) and M. Faleel (52). Destroyed 12 acres of paddy and 3 acres of Maize. Damage Rs. 300,000/-

On 30th November 2003 Tamil terrorists threw grenade and opened fire on unarmed Muslim civilians at 10.30 p.m. at Faizal Nagar – Kanthaldiyoothu. One dead M.S.M. Sakeriya (51) and three injured K.M. Habeeb (37), A.M. Sulaiha Ummah (72) and M.S. Zainabu (35). A house was destroyed. Damage Rs. 50,000/-

On 04<sup>th</sup> December 2003 at 7.00 pm the Tamil terrorists killed a fish dealer Abdul Junaid (28) near Bazaar Mosque in Mutur.

**Refugees as a result of Tamil terrorists attacks in Kinniya**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> November 2003 to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2003**

<u>Area</u>	<u>Muslim Families</u>	<u>Tamil Families</u>	<u>Total</u>
Alankeni	135	270	405
Eachilanthievu	25	147	172
Naduloothu	319	-	319
Mahroofnagar	610	-	610
Maniyarasankulam	286	-	286
Faizal Nagar	530	-	530
Poovarasanthievu	352	-	352
Sammavachchethievu	390	-	390
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>2,647</u></b>	<b><u>417</u></b>	<b><u>3064</u></b>

With all what has happened in the North-East after the cease fire agreement between the GOSL and LTTE, the Muslim issues have become more complicated, Young Muslims are becoming restless and agitating to take up to arms to directly deal with the unidentified third force which they have identified as "Tamil Maravar Padai" if there is no satisfactory response from the government and LTTE.

**M.I.M. Mohideen**

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