
WOMEN SAY NO TO WAR

CONDEMN THE ATTACK ON CIVILIANS AT KEBITHIGOLLEWA

We strongly condemn the LTTE claymore attack on a passenger bus plying between Kanugahawewa and Kebithigollewa. This cruel and senseless attack has taken the lives of 64 men, women and children and injured dozens more – all civilians from poor and disadvantaged village communities. We express our grief and offer our condolences to the bereaved families.

This is the deadliest attack on civilians since the ceasefire agreement and follows on a number of claymore and other attacks which have affected civilians as indicated in our statement of 15 May 2006.

It has also been reported that in response to the Kebithigollewa massacre, the state launched air strikes into the Sampur, Mullaitivu and locations close to Kilinochchi. Air strikes too, however carefully targeted can and do affect civilians and both attack and counter attack of this nature make civilian life extremely insecure and make more vulnerable the situation of civilians caught in the cusp of violent conflict between the State and the LTTE.

The break-down in formal negotiations between the government and the LTTE with the non meeting at Oslo has precipitated military engagement with grave consequences, particularly for civilians, many of whom have suffered the ravages of war for over two decades. Further, the brief promise of peace and the search for a sustainable, negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict has again receded, pushing the country into yet another spiral of violence.

Today, we echo the hope of President Mahinda Rajapakse that the incident at Kebithigollewa will not sabotage the peace process and welcome his statement of commitment to the peace process. We call upon the LTTE to act responsibly and make a similar commitment to peace. We also wish to remind both the LTTE and the State that they must be committed to

the principles of International Humanitarian Law which prohibits attacks against civilians and requires all parties to the conflict to distinguish between civilians and combatants at all times.

We would again like to reiterate, particularly to those who seek to resolve the conflict through war that in cases of protracted conflicts negotiation takes a considerable period of time and often suffers numerous set-backs before the issue is finally resolved.

We also call upon all parties to the conflict and civilians to remember the period of war Sri Lanka experienced and come to the realisation that a resumption of hostilities will bring about even greater destruction. From human casualties, damage to infrastructure and adverse impact on the economy, to more checkpoints and cordon and search operations, a return to war will result in the suspension of “normality” and adversely affect every facet of life of all citizens of Sri Lanka. Particularly vulnerable will be poor and marginalised communities of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim civilians living in the so-called ‘cleared’ and ‘uncleared’ areas and along the ‘border’ of the north and eastern provinces. All proposals and decisions that take the path towards a resumption or continuation of hostilities put their communities and their lives in deadly peril - a peril that those who propound a military solution to the conflict are rarely likely to experience.

Both the Government and the LTTE should desist from further action which further erodes the integrity of the ceasefire agreement and instead strive to find means of common ground and resume an engagement that seeks a negotiated resolution to the conflict. As civilians and as women we say again ‘No to War’, lets in this time of crisis continue our commitment to the peace process and a sustainable peace for all peoples of Sri Lanka. ■

SRI LANKAN WOMEN FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY