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[Media and the suffering of the Tamil people – Noel Nadesan’s Open Letter to Australians](#)

Noel Nadesan, courtesy of the *Daily Mirror*, 14 July 2011 – republished here because of its relevance. Also visit www.transcurrents.com to review wide-ranging and sometimes virulent comments, **Web editor**

As a Tamil domiciled in Australia I served the Tamil community by editing the only Tamil community newspaper, UTHAYAM. I ran it for 14 years My experiences in dealing with the Tamil community, both in Australia and in Sri Lanka, make me feel sad about the callous way in which the media is exploiting the suffering of our Tamil people for self-serving ends. I think I could speak as an independent voice with no allegiances to the politics of either community or political parties. My main concern has been to help our Tamils in Sri Lanka who had to face the brunt of all attacks from the Indians soldiers, Sri Lankan forces and, above all, the so-called Tamil liberators, the LTTE. I have just completed building a small hospital in the island of Eluvaitivu, in which I grew up and, sooner or later, I plan to go back to serve our Tamil people who are desperately in need of help.

It is against this background that I thought of forwarding my comments to you after viewing the re-broadcast of Channel 4 programme, *The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka*. I must confess I felt depressed and I could not sleep that night. I have recovered since then and I feel I must send you my comments for your consideration because I feel that you aired it to exploit the suffering of our people whose need of the hour is not to rake up the bloody past but to find a way out of the past I fail to see how your programme could help the victims of the war – if that was your intention – when their immediate and long-term needs are to regain a future free from these. The sensationalism certainly may help the ratings of Channel 4 and ABC but how will it help our people?

Our people who lived through the horrors of the futile war know that this is only one side of the story. Our Tamil leaders have informed the world that the LTTE has killed more Tamils than all the other forces – Indian, Sri Lankan and rival Tamil parties – put together. The moralizings of the media lacks credibility because our people who lived through the horrors of

the war know who killed whom in what manner. Leaving aside the die-hard partisans, our people know that the LTTE was a cruel and beastly outfit they had never encountered in living memory – and do not want to encounter in all their lives to come.

Undoubtedly, there are Tamils who are jubilant about this broadcast because they are aligned politically to the side (i.e., the LTTE) that perpetrated the worst crimes against the Tamils. If Channel 4 produced a film of the atrocities committed by the LTTE against their own people and the other communities throughout the 33-year-old war – the longest running in Asia – it would shock the world beyond belief.

Then there is the documented story of Velupillai Prabhakaran herding nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians to serve as his human shield when he was retreating. In the last stages he shot the Tamils who were running away from him into the arms of the Sri Lankan forces who were commended for their humanitarian services by the Ban Ki-moon's expert panel and even by Gordon Weiss. Any Tamil who was in Prabhakaran's human shield will tell you that the Sri Lankan force treated them humanely than the LTTE cadres.

The atrocities committed by the LTTE are numerous. Why didn't Channel 4 balance their story with the other side? Yes, there were passing references to LTTE atrocities but you will agree that the blame was put entirely on the Sri Lankan government. Is this fair journalism?

It was a controversial document in which the best of experts disagreed on the authenticity and the accuracy of the contents. For instance, Channel 4 showed images of a young man who was tied to a tree, threatened with a knife and subsequently killed. I was told by sources in the Wanni that this was an LTTE operation and pictures were taken for propaganda purposes by LTTE. Have a close look and you will find among the so-called soldiers a man in slippers. Sri Lankan soldiers never go about in slippers when they go out on operations.

Those who know both sides of the story were appalled by your decision to air a partisan video. Despite occasional references to the LTTE the main thrust of the video was to blame the Sri Lankan government. You were aware of this gross distortion and you went ahead because it fitted into your biased political agenda. As stated by the London Sunday Times, it was shoddy journalism unworthy of a reputed media institution like the ABC. Take the case of Suthanthirapuram which was declared as the first No-Fire Zone for the civilians. The LTTE moved their radio station and artillery unit to fire at Army points from NFZ. They were also firing at the advancing

army from close proximity to the hospital or make-shift hospital. The AGA Parthipan and Dr Shanmugaraja can confirm this. I will quote another incident. When former EROS leader Balakumar and his family, who worked with LTTE for many years, tried to flee in a boat in Mullaitivu in 29th April 2009, the LTTE, knowing very well who he was, fired at them. His young daughter was critically injured and the bullets tore her forearm. Her hand is yet to heal.

These are facts.

How do I know all this? I travelled Sri Lanka seven times last two years widely in war zones in Wanni and talked to the victims who were trapped in the war zones. They knew that they were targeted both sides and they could not comprehend why the LTTE should expose to retaliatory fire in the NFZ. They could not understand why the LTTE turned the NFZ into a war zone. The agents of LTTE in the Tamil diaspora also shed a lot of crocodile tears about the 300,000 IDPs. They described the IDP camps as concentration camps. Knowing the general conditions under which Sri Lankans live I can assure you that the conditions of the Tamils, particularly in the IDP camps, were far superior to the slums of Colombo or even the conditions of the Sinhala villagers and hill country Tamils in remote areas.

Even the Tamil MPs of Tamil Nadu and Indian journalists who visited the camps were convinced that the Sri Lankan authorities had done a very good job under trying conditions. Besides a comparison with the manner in which the government treated the Sinhala JVP rebels who took up arms in 1971 will reveal that the LTTEs received far better treatment than the JVPers. Most of them were incarcerated for more than four years.

However, I wish to emphasize that at this stage the government has to accept responsibility for their share of the civilian casualties and apologise for that and compensate the next of kin. In calling for justice it is fair and just to hold the leaders in the Tamil expatriate groups who financed, lobbied, and gave moral and material support to the LTTE to prolong their futile war. They too are liable for aiding and abetting a banned terrorist group. Justice demands that these leaders, posing as human rights activists in Western bases, too should be tried for the crimes committed by the LTTE against their own people.

On balance, it must be conceded that the elimination of the ruthless LTTE outfit was commendable. What Prabhakaran did to Sri Lanka was 100 times worse than Al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden did to America. Like America any democratic country had the right to eliminate threats to its sovereignty,

peace and stability, transgressing, if necessary, international humanitarian law and international law.

India did it in Punjab and continues to do so in Kashmir. Russians did it in Chechnya. NATO allies are doing the same thing in Libya. America has done it in their war against Al Qaeda since 9/11.

At the end of it all Sri Lankan Tamils now realise that their destiny is inextricably linked with Sri Lanka and Sinhala people. Violence is not the way out. It was the LTTE who sought the military solution and started the war- they have reaped the bloody harvest they sowed. Now we must genuinely commit themselves to the paths of peace, reconstruction and rehabilitation because violence will not lead anywhere except to the destruction of the remaining Tamils in the north and the east.

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