

The protection of Civilians

A Statement by a group of Bishops

We are deeply concerned with recent reports of increasing civilian casualties in the Wanni war. Recent media reports have indicated that a significant number of civilians, including children, have been killed and much more injured over the past two weeks. These deaths were due to shelling as well as shooting. These incidents are cause for serious regret and cannot be justified in any war, specially in a war amongst the people of the same Country.

We extend our condolences to the families of the dead and the assurance of our prayers to the injured. Your prolonged sufferings over the years have been more than those of us who live elsewhere can ever imagine. May God lift up the light of His countenance and give you peace.

As the current war intensifies and the space for civilians correspondingly shrinks, there is a real danger that the rate of civilian casualties could increase even more. It's precisely in times of war, that the right to life of civilians becomes most sacred and requires the uninterrupted attention and protection of all, specially the State.

We therefore earnestly appeal to the GoSL and the LTTE to review their styles of combat that are more likely to endanger trapped civilians

We also appeal to the LTTE that the presence of trapped civilians should not be used to gain military advantage. There should be no restriction of the civilian's right to life and movement.

We once again welcome the setting up of the “ No fire zone “ and thank the GoSL for this initiative . We earnestly plead with both sides to make it work by very seriously respecting the terms of this arrangement and by refraining from battle in the immediate vicinity of this area. Civilians should be assisted to seek refuge in this zone and remain there unharmed till conditions are favourable for them to return to their homes. We also repeat our request that the ICRC, UNHCR and independent Tamil leaders be invited by the GoSL to assist in the monitoring and management of this zone.

We assure all of our prayers and efforts towards a violence free, integrated Sri Lanka.

27th January 2009

The Rt. Revd Thomas Savundranayagam, Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna

The Rt. Revd Rayappu Joseph, Roman Catholic Bishop of Mannar

The Rt. Revd Norbert Andradi, Roman Catholic Bishop of Anuradhapura

The Rt. Revd Kumara Ilangasinghe, Anglican Bishop of Kurunegala

The Rt. Revd. Duleep de Chickera , Bishop of Colombo