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SRI LANKA

Difficult reconciliation between North and South, as government aid proves insufficient

Melani Manel Perera

Two years since the end of the civil war, the South is now enjoying the fruits of peace. The North, instead, is still faced with unsolved problems: jobless refugees, invasive military presence and abandoned war widows. Some Tamils bear witness to the situation.



Colombo (AsiaNews) – Yesterday, 19 May, marked the second anniversary of the end of the civil war between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a bloody conflict that lasted for more than a quarter century. On 19 May 2009, after the killing of rebel leader Valupillai Prabhakaran, Sri Lankan authorities announced that the time for peace and reconciliation among all Sri Lankans had come, without divisions and discrimination. This has occurred in the South, but in the North, many people have told *AsiaNews* that they still live “in fear of just talking”.

Most of the country is at peace. People are not longer in fear of attacks or scared of what the Tamil Tigers might do. Those in the South enjoy the advantages of a modern democracy, but for most ethnic Tamils across the country as well as some non-Tamils, fear still inhabits their lives. For them, it is “better to keep quiet than talk about our agony.”

During the civil war, the residents of entire villages were forced to flee, finding shelter in refugee camps. Many of those displaced still live in those camps without the government providing for their resettlement and repatriation. Many live in “transit” camps in makeshift shelters. They do not have the means to rebuild their homes and have received no financial or material aid to do so. Some did receive food aid as an incentive to move but have refused since it would last only six months, not enough to rebuild a home and a life.

In fact, joblessness is a major problem among Tamils, and some 48 have committed suicide, young and old, uneducated and educated.

What is more, entire Tamil communities cannot return to their land because it was seized by Security Forces and multinational corporations.

There might be peace in Sri Lanka, but many areas are still classified as “high security zones” under military control where violence still takes place and people disappear.

In Omanthe near Jaffna, along Palali Road, the army runs 60 restaurants and motels. Local Tamils wonder why soldiers should manage businesses, which they could do as well. Of course, the military has deeper pockets and can outcompete civilians.

The only signs of economic recovery in the area are new construction, buildings, roads and bridges.

For locals, the war not only took away their loved ones, but also their ability to earn a living, forcing them to rely on handouts, like beggars.

In the Maddukkarai area, Mannar District, many war widows have been forced to find sugar daddies to survive. The government has no aid plans for them or their children even though the war took everything they had.

For these witnesses, the government’s triumphalist statements cannot hide the fact that there are two Sri Lankas, and that in the North, there is none of the “peace and reconciliation” found in the South.

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