

## Statement by Sarvodaya on End of Violent Conflict

The conflict between the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and the LTTE has ended after nearly three decades of hostilities. Today the Government of Sri Lanka is in control of the entire land area of the conflict-ridden Northern Province.

From the early days of conflict Sarvodaya has always championed for the non-violent resolution to conflict and focused on serving civilian population affected by the violence. We believe that non-violence is the only way we can solve differences and challenges in meaningful ways. As early as in 1983, Sarvodaya organized national dialogues to peaceful transformation of conflict and also organized relief programs to support people who suffered due to three decades of conflict. Over the years Sarvodaya led several programs at local and national level to find solutions to the crisis. At the same time, through our wide grassroots network we maintained a strong presence in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and served the affected population through our humanitarian programmes. We remain committed to our value of non-violence and believe that a genuine peace and reconciliation will require respect to each others concerns, values, culture, language, and heritage.

As the recent conflict began to escalate in 2006, Sarvodaya, along with other humanitarian organizations, lobbied for peaceful resolution to recent conflict. However, the final phase of this war had particularly disastrous consequences on the civilian population that was caught in its midst. As Sarvodaya, we acknowledge that civilians in the north suffered tremendous loss and injuries due to the conflict. And, as yet unknown number of lives were lost, injuries caused, and properties destroyed or damaged. A great deal of local and international effort was expended in trying to resolve the conflict through peaceful means, in order to prevent the adverse consequences to the civilian population. However, both parties could never come to an agreement on such a resolution.

As one of the few independent organizations with access to the displaced civilian population, Sarvodaya has played and continues to play a key role in providing humanitarian assistance such as cooked food, clothing, water and sanitation and child nutrition. Given the political and social context we operated in Sri Lanka, we made a conscious decision that our biggest contribution to the affected Tamil population at this given time would be to maintain a very strong presence on the ground in IDP camps and to ensure their access to essential services, medical care and justice.

We also acknowledge that an acute humanitarian emergency exists in the north today, where as many as 280,000 displaced civilians are being housed in temporary camps. In this light, we welcome the statement by President Mahinda Rajapaksa in which he said that the “war against the LTTE was not a war against the Tamil people” and that his government is committed to speedy resettlement of the displaced and a viable political solution is to follow.

While recognizing that for a number of reasons, IDP resettlement will require a prolonged engagement, we urge the government to begin the process as soon as possible in areas with none or low landmine risk. Sarvodaya is ready to become a strong partner in the resettlement process. We also stand committed to enhanced freedom of movement for the IDPs who are presently in camps. As an organization we believe that such freedom of movement is pre-requisite to the restoration of livelihoods and the rebuilding of lives and dignity. Sarvodaya hopes to engage its expertise in micro-finance and rural enterprise development to resuscitate the livelihoods and economy of this populace.

In addition to providing essential services, Sarvodaya in partnership with the Ministry of Health is conducting a special nutrition rehabilitation programme to combat moderate to severe malnutrition among children in displaced families.

Sarvodaya is already involved in the rehabilitation of a large number of underage combatants who are now in the care of the government of Sri Lanka. We are committed to their care and we hope to see a greater number of such young men and women being reintegrated to society.

We also recognize the loss and challenges faced by members of the armed forces and their families, a large proportion of whom come from economically poorer segments of our society. Many have laid down their lives or lost their limbs. Their families would require emotional, psychological and material support. The disabled combatants would require long term rehabilitation. Sarvodaya has a strong presence in rural villages in the South where such rehabilitation and reintegration can happen with maximum community participation.

Last, but not at all least, Sarvodaya believes that the way forward is through genuine reconciliation that leads to a proper healing process for the Tamil community. Sarvodaya's national reawakening programme, *Deshodaya*, which is a grassroots governance process involving local opinion leaders from all Sri Lankan communities, could become of platform and a locally produced political solution that will address the core issues and the root causes of the three-decade long conflict that has scarred our nation.

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*19<sup>th</sup> May 2009*