



NORTH EAST SECRETARIAT ON HUMAN RIGHTS NESOHR

KARADIPPOKU JUNCTION
KILINCHCHI
E-mail : nesohr@hotmail.com
www.nesohr.org

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Trincomalee mob violence on 12 April 2006

The incident

On Wednesday, 12 April 2006 violent mobs raided the streets of Trincomalee town, killing and injuring civilians, burning shops and vehicles, and destroying private and commercial property. This report details the violence through the eyewitness statements of three civilians given below. According to the eyewitness statements, the mobs immediately filled the streets following a bomb explosion near a market. Eyewitnesses stated that the mobs, uninhibited by Sri Lankan armed forces and security forces, began a killing spree and burnt the shops of Tamil civilians.

A total of 20 civilians were killed. At least 48 civilians were injured, 10 of whom were released from hospital care on the same day. Five civilians were transferred to Kandy Hospital for further treatment. Approximately 3,550 people were displaced due to fear and took refuge in Saraswathy School in Kappalthurai, Anpuvalipuram Kalaimakal School and Varodhayanagar Bharathy School of the neighboring villages.

NESOHR was unable to directly communicate with families of the deceased, but was able to collect information on civilians who were killed and property damaged.

Civilians killed

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. D M K Samantha (23) Male | 11. S M Farook (55) Male |
| 2. Thavarajah Mahaluxmy (42) Female | 12. L H Ashanka Milan (21) Male |
| 3. Antonyraj Geethanandani (33) Female | 13. L H Susantha (20) Male |
| 4. Thavarajah Selvakumari (18) Female | 14. Chandra Mathiwus (50) Male |
| 5. Kandasamy Thiraviam (56) Female | 15. V Venkatram (30) Male |
| 6. A M Sudubanda (39) Male | 16. M Selvarajah (44) Male |
| 7. T H Rashmi Dlrangi (08) Female | 17. Nishanka Kumara (17) Male |
| 8. M Pedige Sivamani (30) Female | 18. T Namasivarajah (28) Male |
| 9. Velu Nantheswaran (28) Male | 19. S Maheswary (56) Female |
| 10. M S M Rilvan (36) Male | 20. Unidentified Body Male |

Eyewitness Statements

Statement 1

“Myself, office staff and the entire workforce were present when we heard a bomb blast at about 3.52 p.m. near the Central Road side wall of the ‘Wine Stores’, in front of the entrance to the vegetable market. We did not go out to see what has happened due to our past experience. Our company vehicles were parked in the yard and about 35 of our employees were also there. Within five minutes a small group of Vegetable market Sinhala mob came out and almost immediately thereafter a big mob of about 100 persons from the ‘Korea Watte’ , the Sinhala unauthorized illegal settlement side, came throwing stones and grenades and also armed with swords. Navy personnel were pushing Tamils to be cut by sword by this mob. I also saw the Navy hitting a Tamil lady with a gun who had fallen on the ground. The Navy was also firing. All the vehicles in my yard were set on fire. A lorry with ‘Korea Watte’ Sinhala people also arrived from Fort Frederick side. These people had knives, pistols and petrol cans and started setting fire to Tamil shops including ours and also the Dialog shop. They fired at the lock of the gate of my yard and broke it open. Police arrived at the scene only after about two hours while those policemen who were already there were just standing by without stopping the looting, killing and arson. Navy was also actively participating in this pogrom reminiscent of the July 83. We jumped over the rear-side wall and escaped through Main Street.”



Statement 2

“We heard a bomb blast at about 3.50 p.m. from the Clock Tower side. Following that we heard firing and in order to protect our goods we immediately put the shutters down. Then we saw about 100 persons from all sides in three lorries in about thirty autos and also some coming from the sea shore side. We saw people being chopped and Tamil and Muslim shops being set on fire by mobs. Navy was directing the operation. Vehicles were damaged and set on fire. We ran away to save our life.”

Statement 3

“Around 3.50 p.m. we heard a bomb blast from Clock Tower side. Immediately afterwards we watched through the window and saw about 100 persons with swords, petrol cans, poles, etc. coming from the Clock Tower side. We came out of the building from the rear side, i.e. Central Road side. We saw people near R.R. Group Dialog shop setting fire to their shops while Armed Forces people were watching and not doing anything to stop it. After that we saw Hari Electronics shop being set on fire after removing the things from the shop. Later we saw from the upstairs some boys coming from the sea shore side and pelting stones at our Bank. So we activated the siren around 4.15 p.m. Some Police who were in front of the building asked our Security Guard to stop the siren. But, once the siren was stopped pelting of stones continued. Police who were there did not do anything to stop it. We telephoned the Police and the SLMM. Police said they are coming, but they did not arrive as promised. Security Guards said that our Car Park was under fire. Manager’s car, 8 motorcycles and 2 push cycles were set on fire by the mob. Our Manger contacted a prominent Sinhala businessman and a customer of ours. He also came about two and a half hours later after the boys have left with the Police. Then Army and Navy all arrived. Some of the Navy and Army were all there on the road all this time talking on their mobile with someone while shops are being set on fire. The policemen who are normally on duty in front of our Bank were also there. Later a Navy Bus took us near our homes and dropped as we could not leave the Bank Premises safely on our own.”

Property damage

Forty homes in Sivayogapuram (Kanniya Area) were destroyed by fire. Fifteen homes in Mihinthapuram were destroyed by fire. The front section of Nadesar Kovil (temple) was heavily damaged.

Data from the Chamber of Commerce & Industries of Trincomalee District reported the following loss of business property.

Thirty-two businesses reported 50 to 100 percent property damage and loss due to the mob setting fire and throwing of rocks and other heavy objects.

	Details	Total Invest	Building Loss	Stock Loss
1	Losses from Direct Business	143,333,252.00	32,700,000.00	90,168,002.00
2	Losses from Buildings	23,000,000.00	20,850,000.00	
3	Losses from Houses	5,140,000.00	5,140,000.00	
4	Losses from Vehicles	3,375,000.00		3,375,000.00
	TOTAL (Rs)	174,848,252.00	58,690,000.00	93,543,002.00
	TOTAL LOSS (Rs)	152,233,002.00		

Conclusion

The three eyewitness statements that report the large masses of violent mobs that immediately took to the street beginning the killing and destruction, makes it difficult to believe that the large-scale violence was an instant reaction to the bomb explosion.

A telling aspect of this incident is that it follows the same pattern of the history of attacks on Tamil people. It is a revealing account of how pre-planned and coordinated attacks are nothing new to Tamil people.

1958 mob violence

In his book *Emergency 1958: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots* Tarzie Vittachi writes:

“There was some evidence of method in all this madness-it was crudely but effectively planned. The rioters had arranged signals-one peal of a temple bell to signify police, two to signify army and so on. They also had a simple system of hand signals to give their associates in the distance such information as which way a police patrol went. The element of planning was even more evident in the agent provocateur system which was widely used.”

1977 mob violence

Tamil people have noted about the mob violence that broke out in August 1977 in Jaffna was a pre-planned attack between Sri Lankan security forces and mobs. The Government appointed M C Sansoni, former Chief Justice, for the Commission of Inquiry. Although in his commission report Sansoni did not point out the deliberate and pre-planned actions taken by Sri Lankan police, he did note that the Sri Lankan police failed to protect civilians from the violence and failed to prevent the incidents from continuing on.

1983 mob violence

Paul Sieghart Q.C., Chairman of Justice, the British section of the International Commission of Jurists stated in his report to Sri Lanka:

“Clearly this was not a spontaneous upsurge of communal hatred among the Sinhala people. It was a series of deliberate acts, executed in accordance with a concerted plan, conceived and organised well in advance. But who were the planners? Communal riots in which Tamils are killed, maimed, robbed and rendered homeless are no longer isolated episodes; they are beginning to become a pernicious habit.”

It is surprising that so far there has been no talk of an Independent commission to be appointed by the President on this carnage or of awarding compensation to the next of kin of those who have lost their lives or got their shops and houses looted and burned by one or other of the limbs of the State Armed Forces or by others aided and abetted by them or due to the dereliction of their duties.

We strongly urge that an independent commission including eminent persons of the stature of Chief Justice(Rtd.) Bhagwati or Justice(Rtd.) V.R.Krishna Iyer be appointed for this purpose.

Note by NESOHR: NESOHR is withholding the identities of the people who have provided us with information about the case for their own safety. NESOHR is ready to share more detailed information with any reputable international human rights organizations wishing to inquire into this case.