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OSCE / Karen Minasyan

Russland will eine neue Sicherheitsarchitektur für Europa. Diese soll im Rahmen der OSZE entstehen, birgt aber Kontroversen. Artikel S.19



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Außenminister Spindelegger will eine oft vergessene Region ins Zentrum rücken und damit auf EU-Ebene gehört werden. Artikel S. 22

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# No Peace for Sri Lanka's Displaced

Three months after the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers, 280,000 surviving Tamil civilians still languish in IDP camps run by the Sri Lankan Army. **Text** Augustin Nicolescou

**S**ri Lanka has the power to evoke images of an earthly paradise. Over the past decades, however, the images of Sri Lanka have been increasingly of war, bombings and IDP camps. Most recent are the images of the violent end to the war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan military.

For months, over 300,000 Tamil civilians were caught in the crossfire. Young and old, women and men alike were forced to move again and again with the retreating LTTE. They became a human shield and recruitment pool of last resort. It is difficult to know how many civilians were killed since the start of 2009 until the war's end, as independent monitors and journalists were denied access, but estimates vary from 10,000 to 40,000.

In the final days, casualties increased significantly. Civilians found themselves on a small strip of land along the Indian Ocean, caught between the LTTE and advancing Army divisions. Constant army shelling meant that searching for food and water was a life-endangering endeavor, while the LTTE continued to prevent civilians from fleeing. The

IDPs in the "Manik Farm Camp" in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, wait for a visit of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in end of May 2009. They hope for a better future.



UN Photo / Eskinder Debebe

few remaining doctors gave reports of severe casualties and appalling conditions.

The bloodshed had been foreseeable for months, yet in the end, the norm of Responsibility to Protect was overruled and ineffective in face of Sri Lanka's strong backing from BRIC and many Non-Aligned countries, rallied in the name of sovereignty, anti-neocolonialism and anti-terrorism.

## A new ordeal for survivors

After months of repeated displacement, misery, of being subject to the general brutality and inhumanity of war, some 280,000 managed to survive. But they now find themselves in a continuing ordeal. They were placed immediately in army controlled "welfare camps" from which they have still not been allowed to leave.

After the trauma of war, they are now faced with internment. Many families were separated on arrival to the camps, and have yet to be reunited. There are reports that several thousands have disappeared, and no clear records exist of where they are now.

Despite improvement efforts, conditions remain harsh. Any resemblance to normal life is elusive in the camps. Facilities remain inadequate, with limited access to water sanitation, health care, education, and little communication with the outside world. Access by international organizations and NGOs is restricted. Only a few national NGOs have been selected to provide most services. Making things worse, recent rains have caused severe flooding in many of the camps.

## Alternatives

By any measure, the camps are an enormous undertaking. But the question is whether the added suffering they cause is necessary. The government's argument, that mined areas in the North justify the measure, rings hollow. The costs in terms of continued dissatisfaction among Tamils, and the sheer financial cost of maintaining the camps, are distractions from the pressing needs of post-war Sri Lanka.

The intransigence of the LTTE, which sacrificed the lives and wellbeing of so many for its vision of independence, will not be soon forgotten. But neither will the unjustified internment of the surviving civilians. Militant Tamil movements emerged only after decades of failure by the central government to address the needs and rights of the Tamils.

The government has an opportunity to turn the page, and begin a new era of cooperation and compassion. This means letting the IDPs out of the camps and engaging in a dialog with the Tamil community. To fail to do so means sowing the seeds for a renewed violent conflict in the future. <<