

Secret Memo (1)

<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/07/09COLOMBO695.html>

Monday, 13 July 2009, 10:33

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000695

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

EO 12958 DECL: 06/25/2019

TAGS PGOV, PREL, PREF, PHUM, PTER, EAID, MOPS, CE

SUBJECT: DOCTORS RECANT EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

REF: A. COLOMBO 0435 B. COLOMBO 0448 C. COLOMBO 0454 D. COLOMBO 0554  
COLOMBO 0000695 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: CHARGE D’AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The five doctors who worked inside the final conflict zone (the government-declared “no-fire zone”) and who released accounts of the situation and the numbers of killed and wounded civilians there gave a press conference press conference on July 8. The doctors said they were “pressured” by the LTTE to release the casualty figures during the fighting, and that in reality the number of killed and wounded civilians was much lower. Many international observers doubt the veracity of this “confession”, and casualty figures from other sources are inconsistent with the numbers given by the doctors at the press conference. Some have said the doctors were told they must make this sort of statement or be prosecuted for assisting the LTTE. It is not known if they will in fact be released soon, but it appears they have been treated relatively well while in detention. There is some concern for their safety if the doctors are in fact released. END SUMMARY. 2. (SBU) The five doctors who served in the conflict zone during the final weeks and months of the war, and who provided eyewitness accounts of the situation there during the final months of the conflict between the GSL and the LTTE publicly retracted their previous statements during a press conference arranged by the Government on July 8. The doctors announced that they were “pressured” by the LTTE to make the original statements. The five were taken into custody by the Army at the end of the conflict in May, but are now in CID (police) custody. They said they have been treated well and have been given medical attention. They noted in their statements that during the conflict they had exaggerated the number of killed and injured and also stated that there had never been a shortage of food in the zone. The doctors reported that in reality many civilians were killed trying to escape the LTTE and that the LTTE had commandeered medical supplies brought into the zone for civilians for the wounded LTTE cadres. They said LTTE officials would hand them lists of figures to cite, and then give them phone numbers of sympathetic journalists to contact with the reports. The doctors stated that the actual number of civilian deaths from January until the end of the conflict in mid-May was between 600 and 650, with 1,200 injured during that same time period.

¶3. (S) International media and NGOs are skeptical of the doctors’ statements at the news conference. Credible local NGO sources have said the families were told the doctors may be released following such confessions and they may have had to videotape individual confessions for the president. While it is difficult to pin down solid numbers on anything that happened in the last months of the conflict, other relatively verifiable sources of information are clearly at odds with

these figures. The ICRC reported on May 12 that since mid-February it had evacuated nearly 14,000 sick or wounded civilians and their relatives. Unofficial UN estimates for Tamil civilian deaths over roughly the same January to mid-May time period are more than ten times as high, between 7,000 and 8,000. Those UN estimates did not rigorously seek to exclude deaths of possible LTTE conscripts, but it is unlikely that a ten-fold increase in figures over what the doctors stated this week would be due solely to deaths of LTTE cadres mixed in with the civilian population. 4. (S) Of particular concern is what will happen to the doctors if in fact they are released soon. In a meeting with the Ambassador on May 20, the Defense Secretary indicated that it would probably not be safe to free the doctors until

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after passions had cooled. More recently a senior contact in the CID was demoted because he had worked to improve the detention conditions of the doctors and apparently had expressed too strong of a desire to improve their welfare. 5. (C) COMMENT: The dead and wounded figures given by the doctors at the July 8 press conference would appear to underestimate the true number of casualties during the final months of conflict in the no-fire zone. The GSL appears to be continuing its efforts to downplay the extent of civilian suffering during the last weeks and days of the war. However, a willingness to arrange for the doctors to be released following this confession could signal an effort by the GSL to appease international criticism. If the doctors are released, it will be critical for the GSL to take meaningful action to ensure that the doctors are not then "disappeared" in order to prevent them from making any modifications to this press statement. MOORE

Secret Memo (2)

<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/08/09COLOMBO830.html>

Monday, 24 August 2009, 13:34

S E C R E T COLOMBO 000830

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

EO 12958 DECL: 08/23/2019

TAGS PGOV, PREL, PREF, PHUM, EAID, MOPS, CE

SUBJECT: DOCTORS FROM NO-FIRE ZONE RELEASED ON BAIL

REF: COLOMBO 695

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (S) Four government doctors, held by the police Criminal Investigation Division (CID) since the end of the war in May for allegedly filing false reports on civilian casualties in the No-Fire Zone during the last several months of the war, were released on bail today. XXXXXXXXXXXXX

¶2. (S) The doctors XXXXXXXXXXXXX had been pressured to give the press conference held in early July (reftel), where they recanted all the statements they had made from the No-Fire Zone. They said they were heavily coached for the press conference, given specific lines to say, and even practiced with several members of the local media beforehand. They said they XXXXXXXXXXXXX had not lied when giving their original statements during the war.

¶3. XXXXXXXXXXXXX.

¶4. XXXXXXXXXXXXX

¶5. (S) Comment: The release of the four doctors is a welcome step by the GSL, but clearly they remain under investigation by the CID and now also are potentially under threat of abduction or extrajudicial killing. Post will continue to monitor the situation very closely, but for now the doctors appear to want to maintain as low a profile as possible, without undue attention brought to them either in Sri Lanka or internationally. End Comment. MOORE