

STATEMENT BY CALLUM MACRAE, ISSUED IN MALAYSIA AFTER ARREST OF ORGANISERS OF SCREENING

I am the director of the feature Documentary No Fire Zone: The Killing fields of Sri Lanka.

The film tells the story of the last 138 days of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009 and uses video evidence to show what happened when the Sri Lankan government declared a series of what they called "No Fire Zones" and encouraged several hundred thousand Tamil civilians to gather there where they believed they would be safe.

We show how the government then systematically shelled these areas – and also denied them adequate food and medicine. As a result somewhere between 40,000 and 70,000 civilians are believed to have died.

Our film also contains brutal and distressing images shot by Sri Lankan armed forces in the last few days of the war. This trophy footage depicts a series of war crimes, including the cold-blooded execution of bound, naked, blindfolded prisoners. It also shows the aftermath of brutal sexual assaults on captured Tamil Tiger fighters who have been stripped naked and then shot.

The films I have made on this distressing subject have won many awards internationally. They have been cited by the UN as having played a significant role in bringing these crimes to the attention of national missions to the UN and we were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as a result I came to Malaysia as part of a tour which has involved public and parliamentary screenings in a number of countries, including, most recently, New Zealand and Australia. Today I am travelling on to Canada for further screenings. The film first premiered in front of 200 diplomats and country delegations at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in March.

Yesterday I took part in a screening inside the Malaysian parliament, where MPs expressed very serious concern about the evidence the film contains.

Last night I was present at a screening in Kuala Lumpur. Halfway through the screening I was astonished to be told that some 40 police and members of the government's Censorship Board had arrived and were suggesting that the screening should be stopped. I have never experienced anything like it in any of the many countries, parliaments and international forums at which my films have been shown.

I was advised to leave by a side door – and did so, although I have to say I was taken aback at this extraordinary attempt to silence a film which is seen around the world as such an important piece of evidence of war crimes.

I was even more shocked to hear that some of the organisers of the screening, from Pusat Komnas, had apparently been taken into custody for questioning.

I know from the international reaction to this news already that human rights defenders around the world are also very shocked.

My intention in coming to Malaysia was to bring to the attention of the government here, the awful crimes of which the Sri Lankan government stands accused. The reaction from MPs to the film when they saw it in parliament demonstrated how powerful and important this evidence is.

It is frankly very disturbing that government authorities in Malaysia – instead of studying this evidence and then asking very serious questions of the Sri Lankan government about their responsibility for these crimes – instead seemed to be collaborating with the Sri Lankan Embassy (albeit unsuccessfully) in trying to keep this evidence from public view.

I hope that the government will investigate how this can have happened and will apologise the representatives of Pusat Komnas. These kind of events can obviously be very embarrassing internationally, and I hope that whatever led to these extraordinary events will be investigated to ensure that nothing like this happens again.

Kuala Lumpur Thursday 4th July 2013