

NEWS

Sri Lanka guilty of War Crimes

THE Sri Lanka government is guilty of crimes against humanity, was the conclusion of a war-crimes tribunal, conducted by Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) based in Milan, which held hearings from 14 to 16 January in Dublin, Ireland.

The preliminary findings issued on Saturday January 16 stated that based on eye-witness accounts and other material evidence, Sri Lanka Government is "guilty of War-Crimes" and "guilty of Crimes Against Humanity."

Eye witnesses included several escapees from the final week of Sri Lanka offensive in the Mullaitivu "No Fire Zone" where more than 20,000 Tamil civilians were allegedly slaughtered by Sri Lanka Army training heavy weapons on them.

The tribunal also concluded that the charge of Genocide requires further investigations.

"Harrowing evidence, including video footage, was submitted by eye-witnesses of the use of heavy artillery and phosphorous munitions, and of the continuous violation of human rights by military activity to a panel of ten international jurors over two days," the Peoples Tribunal on Sri Lanka (PTSL) said in a statement.

Using satellite imagery and witness statements, the tribunal was able to construct a timeline for attacks on Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) Hospital, for example.

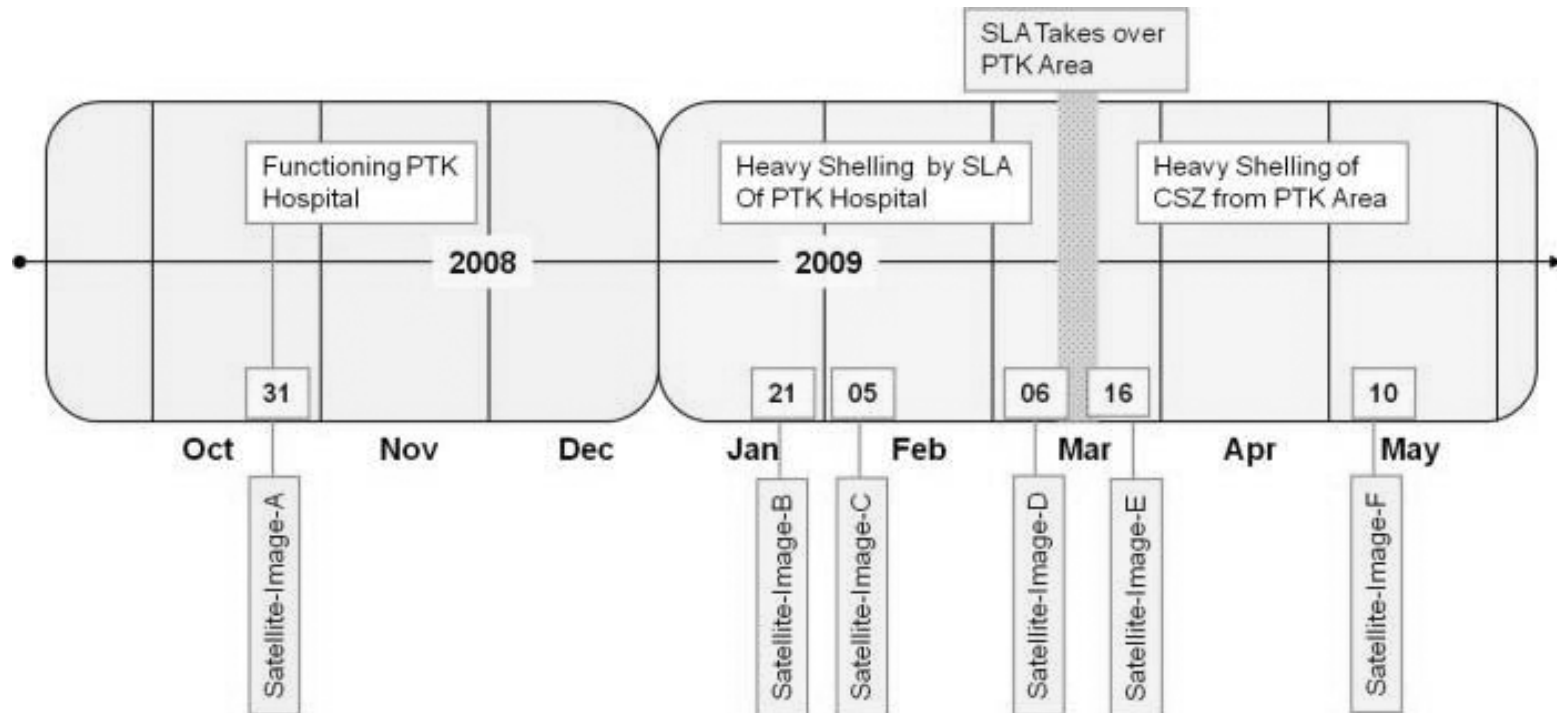
"The presentation in Dublin on Satellite Image Analysis on PTK Hospital is the first step in making international institutions aware the type of legally acceptable evidence that can be gathered from the battle areas which were deliberately kept isolated from news organizations and NGOs by the perpetrator of war-crimes, the Sri Lanka Government," a representative for the US based Tamils Against Genocide (TAG) told TamilNet.

"Attacks on other hospitals, destruction of schools and places of worship will be examined, and evidence collected as follow up steps," they said, adding that this evidence will be used to bolster the case that the actions of the Sri Lankan government amounted to genocide.

The hearings were conducted in public as well as in camera to protect the identity of key witnesses.

An affidavit containing the personal testimony of Dr Manoharan, the father of Ragihar, one of the five high school students shot dead in execution style in Trincomalee beach nearly four years ago by members of Sri Lanka security forces, and two detailed reports of evidence collected on the killings by a Rights Group whose members are in self-exile due to threat to their lives, were also submitted as record of evidence to the tribunal.

The tribunal, chaired by Francois Houtart, also accused



the international community, UK and the USA in particular, of being instrumental in the break down of the peace process between the Sri Lanka government and the Tamil Tigers.

The PTSL is an initiative of the Ireland peace process supported by the University of Dublin and Dublin City University.

The Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka has urged the government to allow the UN to conduct an inquiry into the war crimes and to release all internally displaced people and former combatants.

The Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka asserted that long term peace and stability can only be established on the basis of full justice and rights for all the inhabitants of the island.

The Sri Lanka government however has denied the findings with Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, describing the Permanent People's Tribunal as a 'kangaroo court'.

A statement released by the Sri Lankan government said, the judgments of the 'Permanent People's Tribunal on Sri Lanka' will do nothing to further permanent peace efforts in Sri Lanka, but pose a serious threat to the country's stability.

"We strongly condemn any unaccountable organization, whether it purports to be a quasi-legal entity or not, irresponsibly distorting events and seeking to selectively pass judgment from afar."

The statement went on to claim that the members of the tribunal should be helping Sri Lanka unite and move on at the end of a terrible conflict, not continue to stoke it.

The tribunal was shown satellite evidence of attacks on hospitals in the last days of the war



Over 64,000 Tamils say yes ...

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Given the long queues, officials at some polling stations were compelled to extend the voting time by two hours in order to accommodate the unprecedented numbers. But by 8pm all polling stations had closed, and counting began at various locations across London.

Under the glistening lights of the Ballroom, guests including several members of parliament, councillors and journalists, settled down for supper as the final votes were counted.

Volunteers and independent officials, under the scrutiny of referendum monitors, painstakingly examined each and every yellow ballot paper that was counted in the central London Park Lane hotel.

Professor Bryan Woodriff, chairman of the referendum monitoring committee, wove his way through the crowd of vote counters, inspecting the proceedings and discussing the conduct of the referendum with other members of the monitoring committee.

At other locations across London, officials there were engaged in a similar process, examining each ballot paper and ensuring that all were accurately tallied, all under the eagle eyes of independent election monitors.

Shortly after 11pm on Sunday, the Ballroom erupted with cheering and applause as Professor Woodriff announced the final result.

With no clear census information, an accurate number of eligible voters remains impossible to verify, but the guests expressed

absolute satisfaction at a turn out of over 64000.

Although a result of over 99% in favour of independence was widely celebrated, the prevailing mood amongst British Tamils appeared to be one of vindication than elation.

Perturbed by such an overwhelming call for independence and the significant national media coverage the referendum received, Sri Lankan officials have swiftly attempted to discredit its significance.

Sri Lanka's Defence spokesman, Minister Kehiliya Rambukwella, was reported to have said they were not concerned by any referendum conducted by any community or country.

The Tamil Diaspora however remains defiant and resolute. They want Tamil Eelam.