



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Thirty-fourth session

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Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

## **Written statement\* submitted by the Association Bharathi Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2017]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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## **Water Crisis in Jaffna – A structural Genocide perpetrated by the Sinhala government**

Water is considered to be the lifeline of human existence. The blood that runs through the human body is composed predominately of water, just as the earth is composed primarily of bodies of water. Not only is water crucial for the basic survival of plants, animals and humans, it is also vital to maintain hygiene and cleanliness. Water, is revered as the crux of civilization.

In the recent past, water problem in Tamil Eelam ( Northern Sri Lanka) has been a cause of concern. Be it through the oil pollution at Chunnakam or Vallikammam or the depleting Jaffna aquifer, the main source of water to Jaffna peninsula due to over usage, perpetrated by the massive presence of the armed forces.

Kusum Athukorala, who heads the Network of Women Water Professionals and is the winner of the 2012 Women in Water award, told *SciDev.Net*, that with thousands of people returning to settle in the former warzone, groundwater extraction is bound to increase. Since this will create more imbalances, some regulation will help prevent a future crisis<sup>1</sup>. The question is who has the authority and the will power to do it?

Heavy fuel oil waste pumped back into the earth from the Chunnakam power station has contaminated wells and drinking water in local areas including Udumalai and Tellipalai. It continues to spread into other regions of the Jaffna peninsula. Health department officials warned that consuming the contaminated water may result in serious illnesses such as cancer, infertility, and birth defects. This has led to continuous protest from people of people who are severely affected. Yet there is no respite as no concrete action has been initiated.

Responding to the situation the Chief Minister of the Northern Province, Justice C.V.Wigneswaran said “I would say that oil and grease in water is only a part of the problem. I am told there are nitrates, phosphates and other contaminants in the well waters used in the Northern Province which have been the consequence of the indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides in areas of intense agricultural cultivation. The consequences of the use of deadly weapons during the War on the land have still not been scientifically assessed.”<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the Oil pollutant, it has transpired from the researches that the Jaffna ground water had been contaminated with agro-chemicals and (e-coli) germs found in human faeces, Provincial Minister of Environment P. Ainkaranesan said that the Jaffna Municipal Council and the armed forces stationed in Jaffna were dumping excrement in dry and waste land polluting the environment, he charged. He said that the armed forces dumped human excrement in Neerveli, while the Jaffna Municipal Council dumped excrement in Kallundaveli, which is a waste land<sup>3</sup>.

This situation has led to the National Water Supply and Drainage Board advising the people to drink bottled water instead of making alternate arrangements. This crisis has led to south based multinational companies making huge profits selling bottled water to the hapless people.

With the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 came a new wave of development that is steadily transforming Jaffna into a bustling metropolis working overtime to make up for the ‘stagnation’ that prevailed during the war years.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scidev.net/south-asia/farming/news/jaffna-aquifer-depleting-from-overuse.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Province Chief Minister Justice C.V.Wigneswaran’s speech on Drinking Water Contamination Issue In Jaffna District – Meeting of officials and others at the Jaffna Kachcheri on 12/04/2015 at 9.30 am*  
<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/drinking-water-contamination-issue-in-jaffna-reactions-and-responses/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dailymirror.lk/54191/war-over-water#sthash.9bOHcMsT.dpuf>

While many observers have hailed these plans to put Jaffna into development overdrive, environmental experts are warning that the region's water supply, which remained relatively untouched during the war, will not withstand an all-out offensive in the name of economic growth.

A recent study undertaken by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) found that Jaffna's delicate underground water table could easily be polluted from rampant use of fertiliser, or disturbed by extraction efforts that could allow seawater to seep into the shallow freshwater supply<sup>4</sup>.

Lack of proper drinking water, scarcity of resources towards sustainable livelihood has severely hampered resettlement of Tamils in their own land. Current reports allege that 49,509 resettled families in the area are without access to toilets<sup>5</sup>.

The Chief Minister of the Northern Province too has argued that the army extensively uses the resources of the Tamils. He charged that the army is cultivating the peoples' lands and is using up water which is a scarce commodity in Jaffna peninsula. It is polluting the area and causing fear among the people<sup>6</sup>.

Though so far there have been continuous protests from different sections of the people, the government has not taken any concrete steps to mitigate the sufferings of the Tamils. The more than 50,000 armed forces in the peninsula take away the essential water of the civilians. The resorts run by the navy use enormous amounts of water. The alternatives suggested like the pumping of water from the Iranamadu tank is only a temporary measures.

The Government of Sri Lanka will do well to remove the highest military concentration in any peace zone in the world and hand over the land to its rightful owners who would use water diligently and help in water conservation through rain water harvesting schemes. As a measure of reconciliation the GoSL must withdraw the armed forces which would go a long way in saving the precious resources of the Tamils.

Water is life and sound management of water resources is an integral component of the new paradigm for sustainable development – one that allows the steady improvement in living standards without destroying the fragile natural capital of river, marine and groundwater systems. In the interest of the people, the Government of Sri Lanka must recognize that water is a right of the people and help them to get it for their uses or the Tamils are surely going to see this scheme of denying them clean water as part of the strategy of structural genocide of the Tamils by successive governments.

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<sup>4</sup> Amantha Perera War's End Threatens Water Supply in Northern Sri Lanka, Inter Press Service, JAFFNA, Sri Lanka, Nov 10 2012

<sup>5</sup> The Island (2014) '2,200 resettled families to get new toilets', 4th June, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.asianmirror.lk/news/item/7254-wigneswaran-says-government-statements-on-army-camps-triggered-genocide-resolution>