



My Ref.

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Mr. Alan Rusbridger
The Editor
The Guardian

Dear Mr. Rusbridger

The Guardian article "Eyewitness to carnage The British Woman caught in brutal Civil War" by Gethin Chamberlain – 16/9/2009

I am compelled to write to you after reading the above article which appeared in the front page and pages 13 & 14 of the Guardian today. While the readership could accept the comments made by Ms. Gnanakumar as credible due to the fact that she had been in the war zone that very fact does not make everything Ms. Gnanakumar utters true. Can Ms. Gnanakumar say anything that sound "credible" and "authentic" just because it comes from a person who is a "British National?". The Guardian article also says that Ms. Gnanakumar "speaks in a matter-of-fact way, rarely betraying emotions." Does the journalist try to reiterate the readership that everything she says was correct and true as a "matter of fact" and should be taken as unchallengeable truth?

I have noticed three elements the article has not attempted to clarify.

1. The real reason for a young British woman to visit an area of an armed conflict at a time when the others were fleeing.
2. How long did she really stay in Sri Lanka and why did she wanted to get back to the UK just after the LTTE was defeated and not before. (She has asked her mother to "just get me out of here, I just want to get out from this place" only after reaching the government controlled areas.)
3. Why does Ms. Gnanakumar not talk about the LTTE and their atrocities and accuse only the government of Sri Lanka when she was able to witness the activities of the LTTE inside their territory. The UN, ICRC and the civilians who escaped vividly narrated the crimes committed by the LTTE within the no-fire zone.

The reality is that Ms. Gnanakumar went to Sri Lanka with the knowledge of the LTTE and worked for an LTTE agenda. Therefore, she carefully avoids any reference to the LTTE (not at least once during the interview), its activities or atrocities that she would have obviously witnessed. The atrocities of the LTTE such as shooting at the people who were trying to flee the area they controlled and maiming men, women and children for not being obedient to them, conscription of children were well reported

during that period. Ms. Gnanakumar's allegations against the government prove that she has a sinister agenda to discredit the government of Sri Lanka and whitewash the LTTE.

This was proved beyond any doubt by Channel 4 News interview with Ms. Gnanakumar yesterday (16/9/9) at 1900 hrs BST news bulletin, where she vehemently but unsuccessfully defended when she was asked about the LTTE for its well documented atrocities which were not known only to her:

Excerpt from the interview by Ms. Gnanakumar with Mr. Jonathan Miller of Channel 4 News;

Jonathan Miller: You are confident that the shells that killed people for example weren't shells fired by the Tamil tiger positions?

Damilvany Gnanakumar: I mean *it can't be* because the Tamil tigers were living within some civilians there and they don't want to kill their own people. They were fighting for them. They worked so hard to save the people.

Jonathan Miller: But they were also accused of using their own people as a human shield?

Damilvany Gnanakumar: I didn't personally experience any of that. So I can't really comment on that.

Your attention is drawn to her first response where she says **"it can't be"** the Tamil tigers who shelled the civilians. She is not exactly sure as to who shelled while being inside that very enclave with the LTTE and she only casts doubt about it, unsuccessfully trying to cover up the LTTE. In that case, how could she be so sure of the shelling by the government forces who were further away from her, then?

Isn't it strange that she has not 'experienced' that there was a human shield while the whole world was aware and demanding the LTTE to release the civilians? Ms. Gnanakumar is unable to comment when she cannot controvert the reality.

In addition, there are many factual inaccuracies and misinformation in the article. Ms. Gnanakumar says that she was thinking "What have the people done wrong, why are they going through this, why are the international governments not speaking up for them?" referring to the suffering of the civilians in the hands of the "government

forces". However, the actual situation at that time was that the foreign governments including USA, UK, UN and EU were requesting the LTTE to lay down arms and surrender so that the suffering of the people would come to an end. The international community, UN and the ICRC repeatedly requested the LTTE to release the civilians who were being held as a human shield. Unfortunately, the Guardian journalist has not referred to this but quotes only Ms. Gnanakumar's view. The journalist appears very amateurish.

The Guardian article is factually wrong when it says "only two thousand have so far been released" from the welfare villages. The government of Sri Lanka in the first place has not detained the internally displaced people, but has provided them with shelter, food, medicine, security and other essential needs as they were destitute. So far the government of Sri Lanka has resettled twenty six thousand persons in their original habitats and the government is committed to resettle a substantial number of them before the beginning of the monsoon and at least 80% by the end of the year.

The article also questions as to why the government needs to "imprison children and the elderly behind barbed wire and why it has not more quickly identified rebels." The government has requested the children below 10 years and the elderly people over 60 years to leave if anyone is prepared to foster them. However, only a small number of them have left and the others have stayed with their families inside welfare villages as they have no other place to go.

Ms. Gnanakumar complains about the IDP welfare centres saying that it came to her "as a shock". She is talking about "big queues" "terrible toilets" and "all sorts of illnesses" in welfare villages. However, she has not attempted to compare the situation with that of when they were under the LTTE. The conditions inside the welfare centres are getting better everyday though they were not ideal in the beginning. The government is spending Rs. Five million a day to provide essential requirements to the internally displaced people inside these welfare centres. The government is also providing education to the children in the welfare centres continuously and held all the examinations inside the welfare centres. International community including the visiting UK Parliamentarians have acknowledged that the conditions in the welfare centres have vastly improved. The Guardian article has not at all bothered to see this side of the story.

Ms. Gnanakumar states that a doctor died due to a Sri Lanka army bombing during the last phase of war. This is inaccurate and there was not a single government doctor died during the entire conflict.

Some of the comments by Ms. Gnanakumar are hard to believe. She says "*one day I was inside the operating theatre and the next room was bombed they all died in that shell bomb*" It is unbelievable that when a shell hit one room and killed all the people in that room and the other room has not been affected at all. This again, very clearly illustrates Ms. Gnanakumar's inability and incapability to comment on military activities and it makes all her claims on the attacks by the Sri Lankan forces laughable. In a very close combat one should be a military expert to comment on what sort of a weapon was used and from which direction the fire originated etc.

Ms. Gnanakumar also says that “with replacement blood running out, she had to filter what she could from the patients through a cloth before feeding it back to their veins”. Does this mean that Ms. Gnanakumar ‘extracted’ blood “from the patients” and transferred them to others? It is hard to believe that the Guardian regarded this extraordinary blood transfusion method true and went on to publish in the article. Amateurish!

Ms. Gnanakumar says that she believes that twenty thousand people died in the last five days of the conflict. The journalist has attempted to sound this as a credible figure saying that the Global Tamil Forum corroborates her account with their own figure. This clearly shows that Ms. Gnanakumar has had a LTTE agenda as the Global Tamil Forum is a well-known LTTE front organisation. The Guardian has been unable to explain from where the Global Tamil forum obtained that questionable figure. The government of Sri Lanka has categorically denied that there had been twenty thousand civilian deaths in the last phase of the war and repeatedly discounted the accuracy of figure with verifiable sources. In fact the UN has acknowledged that there have not been such deaths.

- UN Secretary General has said to the UN General Assembly on 1 June that the media reports alleging that some 20,000 civilians may have been killed during the last phase of the conflict “do not emanate from the UN and most are not consistent with the information at our disposal.”

Source: UN News Centre > www.un.org/news

- Sir John Holmes, the UN, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator said on 31 May “That figure [20,000] has no status as far as we're concerned,”

Source: Al Jazeera (English) www.aljazeera.com/english

- Spokesperson for UNSG, Ms. Michele Montas on 1 June at the noon press briefing said that “In the month of May we had absolutely no way of knowing what the casualty figure was. The number of 20,000 is not a UN number” [The Spokesperson later added that as regards to the media reports on the figure of 20,000 civilian casualties in Sri Lanka, it was verified with the concerned United Nations staff who were present at meetings of United Nations senior officials that no such internal report was made at those meetings]

Source: UN web Site>

<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/db090601.doc.htm>

- On 29th May 2009 at the noon press briefing Ms. Marie Okabe, Deputy Spokesperson for UNSG said “Okay, on that, first of all, the media reports of the latest figures that you’re speaking to, I did check with

OCHA and they do not know where these specific figures are coming from".

Source: UN web Site>

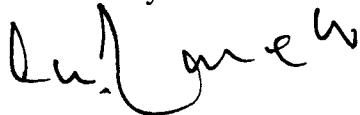
<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/db090501.doc.htm>

The journalist says that by June 2008 the LTTE "*still thought they will be able to negotiate a ceasefire as they had done in the past*". He has conveniently ignored the fact that whenever the LTTE pleaded for a ceasefire it was only to regroup and to rearm and the LTTE attempted to repeat the same technique this time as well. Had they wanted to negotiate a solution they would have heeded the many calls by the President and the government of Sri Lanka for them to come to the negotiating table. In fact the last attempt of the government for political negotiations was made in 2007, while the LTTE was attacking the government forces and civilians. The LTTE delegation who went to Geneva to finalise a methodology for discussing the ceasefire did not want to meet the Sri Lankan delegation even after flying to Geneva. Therefore there was no reason for the government to believe that the LTTE genuinely interested in peace and constructive negotiations in June 2008.

In the light of the above you would agree that all the claims made by Ms. Gnanakumar are wrong, misinformed and inaccurate. It is impossible to consider Ms. Gnanakumar as an independent source of information considering her biased opinion towards the LTTE. Therefore, it is regrettable that your paper has given wide publicity to the views of a person sharing the ideology of the LTTE, a well known terrorist organization that is banned in many countries including the UK by allocating more than two pages for the article with two photographs of Ms. Gnanakumar appearing in it while carrying the High Commission statement only partially.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely



Justice Nihal Jayasinghe
High Commissioner

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2. Mr. Gethin Chamberlain - gethin.chamberlain@gmail.com