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» 11/13/2006 13:02

SRI LANKA

Bishop to hand out baby formula to hungry children of Jaffna
by Col Memara

In view of a humanitarian crisis in the north, an NGO from Negombo ships 500 packs of baby formula to the bishop of Jaffna who will hand them out to the needy. Street protests take place against the government's indifference towards the plight of the Tamil population.



Colombo (AsiaNews) – A non governmental organisation based in Negombo, north of the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo, launched a plan on November 8 to supply baby formula to the children of Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, where a humanitarian crisis has been worsening over the last few months.

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Responding to an appeal made by the local bishop, who denounced the lack of food supplies reaching the north, the 'Negombo People's Collective for a Political Solution' sent 500 packs of baby food by mail to the bishop's residence.

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Fr Terrence Fernando, a leading member of the collective, told *AsiaNews* that "it is exactly three months since A-9 highway was closed. We took this initiative to bring some normalcy back into the lives of the people of the area".

The A-9 is the major road that links Jaffna peninsula to the rest of the country and is the only one that can be used by heavy duty lorries. Since the government shut it down following escalating clashes between Tamil Tiger rebels and security forces, residents have had to endure shortages of food, fuel and medicine.

"The bishop himself, Mgr Thomas Savundaranayagam will hand out the aid to the needy," Father Fernando said.

But the mobilisation of Negombo People's Collective for a Political Solution does not stop there. It is pressing the government to find a solution to the crisis in the north. On November 8 a silent protest was held in front Colombo's main postal office that involved about 175 people, priests and nuns included. They wore bandanas that said "STOP STARVATION" in Sinhalese and English.

On October 25 Mgr Savundaranayagam sent a telegram to Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse urgently appealing to him to reopen A-9 Highway or find alternative ways to deliver food and drugs to the population.

The government however has claimed that emergency supplies sent to Jaffna by the sea route are sufficient to satisfy the primary needs of the residents and has denied there is any crisis.



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by Col Memara

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