

Sri Lanka Concerns Pope, Says Nuncio

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Benedict XVI is alarmed by the numerous violations of human and civil rights in Sri Lanka, says the country's papal nuncio.

Archbishop Mario Zenari confirmed that view on his return from a visit Dec. 6-7 to Jaffna, one of the areas suffering from ongoing violence.

The papal representative's 24-hour visit, for the sole purpose of solidarity, was made possible by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees agency, which allowed him to take a charter flight of the organization.

AsiaNews reported the prelate's impressions on his return from Jaffna, where the civilian population faces a grave humanitarian crisis, trapped and isolated in the cross fire of the army and the Tamil Tiger separatist guerrillas.

Archbishop Zenari, the nuncio, said that he still believes the country will regain peace and serenity after witnessing the devastation of the 2004 tsunami, the murder of a Catholic politician in the Batticaloa cathedral, and the resumption of civil war in the northeast.

"The heart of the problem is that radical change is needed, a conversion of hearts of all those concerned in this painful conflict, including us Christians," the nuncio said.

On arrival in Jaffna, Archbishop Zenari met with Bishop Thomas Savundranayagam and some priests of the diocese, who explained the tragic situation of the population.

During his visit, the nuncio met with the wife of layman Wenceslaus Vimalathas, 40, a father of five, who disappeared in August near a military checkpoint in Allapiddy, together with a Catholic priest, Father Jim Brown.

Archbishop Zenari informed the Pope about these two disappearances when he was in Rome last September.

"The Pontiff expressed alarm at the news and when he heard about the numerous other cases of human rights violations in Sri Lanka," said the nuncio. He and Bishop Savundaranayagam are urging the government to shed light on Father Brown's case.