

From the office of

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Essence of speech made by Mano Ganesan MP in Parliament during the debate of the extension of emergency on 06th May , 2008

(Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker.)

I was fortunate to listen to Jatika Hela Urumaya's Ven. Metananda Thero. Hon Member of Parliament Ven. Thero spoke about the prevailing situation at Madu church in Mannar. He started by saying that Madu Church was once a Buddhist temple later became a Hindu temple. He claimed that the Portuguese demolished the Hindu temple and built this Madu church.

Now the Bishop of Mannar Rev. Rayappu Joseph has called both the government and the LTTE to agree to the proposal of making the Madu church and environment to be declared as a peace zone.

Ven. Thero is calling the Bishop wrong.

We wish to very categorically state that Ven. Thero is making matters worse based on Buddhist fundamentalism. It is further making matters worse and amount to opening up a war front between the Buddhist and Catholics. I can explain.

We have very often heard many frequent voices from the government benches , from the JHU , from the southern polity , from the international community calling upon the Tamil people to 'advice' the LTTE to change it's course from violence to democracy. Yes , it is correct. The interests of the people should prevail over any organisation or government.

Rev. Bishop Rayappu Joseph is the leader of the Catholic population of Mannar. It is what the civil society is. He is the most accepted and respected civil leader in Mannar. He is part of the church. He is addressing both parties of the conflict. He is also placing conditions to the LTTE. He is asking the LTTE to agree and respect the proposal of zone of peace.

Sri Lanka Army is part of the government. LTTE fighting units are not part of government. There is a war. There are two parties. Not only the Rev. Bishop but even the international community would deal with all the parties of the conflict. Humanitarian aids cannot reach the needy and civilian arrangements cannot be

formulated unless you accept this ground reality. Therefore please do not find fault with the Rev. Bishop.

Those who demand the Tamil people and civil society leaders to pressurize LTTE should strengthen the hands of the Tamil civil society leaders and respective civil society organizations. But what the Ven. Thero tells is just the opposite. His stand weakens the hands of the Rev. Bishop.

We support Rev. Bishop Rayappu Joseph's Madu church peace zone proposal. It should be understood in the correct perspective by both the government and the LTTE. It should be accepted by both parties. Once it is accepted there will be a code of conduct in force. If the LTTE violates the code of conduct in respect of the 'Madu church peace zone' it would go against its' own interests. It will be bad for LTTE internationally.

This is what the Tamil Catholics and Tamil civil society can do at the moment. The southern civil society should come forward and join in this campaign. JHU is as usual looking at the things from a Buddhist fundamentalist view point. They begin by saying that Madu church is built on a Buddhist site. We cannot accept any of this. Even if you assume that this information is correct , you cannot demolish down all the catholic churches. This is because Christianity is no more an alien religion. It is very much Sri Lankan now. You cannot seek answers to today's issues in the history books. Christianity is the only religion which brings Tamils and Sinhalese together. We talk about Tamil Buddhism but in reality there are no Tamil Buddhists. Sinhalese visit Hindu Temples but there are no Sinhala Hindus. But there are Tamil and Sinhala Christians. So let us allow the church to play the natural historical role at this juncture.

Instead of fundamentalist maneuvers the Ven. Thero should look at these positive aspects in the uniqueness of Christianity what can bring Tamils and Sinhalese together. Or it would be helpful if the Church and Christians , Tamils and Sinhalese are allowed to sort out this matter with the government and LTTE without any outside interference.

On the other hand there is another fear prevail among the Tamils. It is a reasonable fear. The Tamil Hindu Keerimalai-Naguleshwaram in the north is now a security zone. So are the Thirukoneshwaram in the east and Thiruketheeswaram in the west. Those who oppose peace zones in the Tamil territory very casually go for declarations of security zones. The fate of Madu will also end up with a security zone proposal. This security zone will pave way for Sinhalisation of the Madu church. It had happened right along the western coastal belt from Negombo to Puttalam. Madu is worshipped by Tamils and Sinhalese. It is good. But it is historically a Tamil dominated Catholic Church. Nothing wrong in this ground reality. Rev. Rayappu Joseph's sense fear and feeling of insecurity is very much historically justified. The Catholic Church of Sri Lanka has lot of blame on this score. It gave priority to Sinhalisation over Christianity in the past. It should not

happen again. It should accommodate this Tamil fear represented by Rev. Bishop Rayappu Joseph.