Census on human and property damages due to conflict - 2013

Rights activists and political groups have expressed apprehension regarding the census conducted by the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs and the Department of Census and Statistics. The census is being conducted at Grama Niladharli Division level to assess the human and property damages and to publish a report under the National Action Plan prepared by the Task Force appointed by the President to implement the recommendations of the Lessons learned and Reconciliation Commission. This nation-wide census was carried out in 14,022 Grama Niladhari Divisions to collect detailed information on the deaths, injured and / or disabled, missing and damages to the property since 1983 up to May 2009. It began on November 28, 2013 and was concluded on December 20, 2013; the final report will be made available in March 2014.

However, several stakeholders including rights activists, Tamil politicians and religious leaders say that the census was not properly conducted. It has been pointed out that the government failed to take the necessary steps to create awareness among the public about the census and the purpose of the census. It is also stated that the duration allocated to collect the information was too short. Though the information available on the Department’s website denotes that the information will be collected from the persons staying at special institutions such as elders’ homes, children’s homes and religious places where conflict affected people are residing, it is learned that the victims were allowed to give information only about his / her family. They were able to give information about their spouses, sons and / or daughters and properties. It was not possible for the married victims to give information about their parents or siblings or properties. Thus, if an entire family had died in the war, that information will not be included in the census. And that will result in lower figures of war fatalities.

Furthermore, the L2 form used to record all the information collected from the victims, which was not given to the victims and was completed by the Grama Niladharis was incomprehensive. The column D.17 inquires about the individual responsible for the death of the victim. Under that column five categories of people / groups mentioned and those categories do NOT include government forces. It rather says “groups suspected to be the government forces” (“groups suspected to be the government forces”).
Though the Director General has told that the questionnaire (L1 and L2 forms) comprised the causes of loss and every other factor relating to the loss, the circumstances of incidences of disappearances and deaths were not accommodated in the L2 form or anywhere in the census process.

Despite the concerns of various groups including human rights activists the Government has claimed that the questionnaire was prepared after consultation with a steering committee which comprised experts in their relevant fields as well as all stakeholders. The Department further stated that the census was done according to international standards and practices of data collection with every aspect of loss being addressed.

If the Government of Sri Lanka is seriously committed to work towards reconciliation, genuine actions must be initiated to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the LLRC.