



SE World
HD Tamil 'Tutu' tells of abuses

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S.J. EMMANUEL has been called the ``Desmond Tutu'' of Sri Lanka but he does not have the worldwide profile of his venerated South African friend.

Both men are eminent clerics, with Dr Emmanuel, who was born in Jaffna in 1934, graduating in philosophy and theology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome.

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The Sri Lankan studied alongside Australian Archbishop George Pell and both men were ordained as priests at St Peter's Basilica in 1966.

But while Archbishop Tutu won recognition for his anti-apartheid cause, the world has been less receptive to Dr Emmanuel's work on behalf of Sri Lanka's Tamil minority in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

These days Dr Emmanuel, who is based in Germany, is president of Global Tamil Forum. His message now is that Tamils are suffering widespread human-rights abuses in the aftermath of the civil war, which ended in 2009 with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

``Of course, abuses are happening," he told The Courier-Mail.

``There is no LTTE so there should be peace in the region. Just the opposite is happening. What we have is a permanent militarisation of the north-east."

According to Dr Emmanuel, the government in Colombo is sponsoring colonisation of Tamil homelands by Sri Lankans from the majority Sinhalese ethnic group. Buddhist shrines are in Hindu and Muslim areas.

Dr Emmanuel has written three books on the suffering of the Tamils, including Let My People Go, published in 1997. He chronicles the discrimination and persecution that led to civil war in the 1980s.

The story is compelling but the Tamil cause is deeply unfashionable because of the unsavoury reputation of the LTTE, an extremist group that pioneered suicide bombings and allegedly kidnapped teenagers for its guerilla army.

As a distinguished Catholic theologian, Dr Emmanuel is vehemently opposed to suicide bombings.

But he has wide personal experience of the discrimination in jobs and education and the atrocities that made Tamils take up arms.

``I have seen people pushed and kicked until they retaliate," he said.

``They had to resist state terrorism. For 30 years, all the laws were against the Tamils."

Dr Emmanuel was one of more than 500,000 refugees who fled Jaffna in October 1995, crossing Kilali lagoon and finding refuge in the jungles of the Wannai region. After a year in the forest, he moved to Europe in self-exile.

His claims about the current situation in Sri Lanka are backed up by a report released in January by Minority Rights Group International.

Dr Emmanuel has called on the Australian Government to re-examine its relationship with Sri Lanka "on the basis of truth, justice and human rights".

NS gcat : Political/General News

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