

2009 ATTACKS ON HOSPITALS



Kilinochchi District Hospital was a long-established Government-run medical facility. There were no LTTE positions in its vicinity. The town and its Hospital was repeatedly shelled on 25 October, 24 December and 30 December 2008. The shelling came from the direction of Sri Lankan army positions¹.

“I actually saw Kfir jets coming in and dropping the bombs. Many patients and medical staff in the operating theatre were killed and wounded”.

ITJP WITNESS 110



PTK Government-run hospital comprised of 10 main buildings and more than 20 auxiliary buildings. It was clearly marked with Red Cross emblems and the Government knew the GPS coordinates for the hospital. There was also frequent surveillance of the areas by the security forces using drones².

The UN said the PTK Hospital was one of the most heavily attacked medical facilities during the war³.

The hospital was hit every day during the week of 29 January – 4 February 2009. The site was overcrowded with the injured lying on the floor, containing well over 500 patients. There exist hundreds of photographs of this site.

“I was there when PTK hospital was attacked. My aunt was re-injured (this time the left hand side of the stomach) because of the shell attack. She was inside the building. The drones went overhead all the time”.

ITJP WITNESS 119



Vallipunam was in the first No Fire Zone (NFZ1) announced on 20 January 2009 by Jagath Jayasuriya himself⁵. The “No Fire Zones” however were repeatedly attacked. Vallipunam had a makeshift hospital established in a school building. It was clearly identified and the coordinates were known to the Sri Lankan military and in particular to Jagath Jayasuriya as Vanni Security Force Commander⁶. The hospital was repeatedly attacked on 18,19 and 20 January 2009.

“I was actually in the hospital when a big shell hit and we ran out. In

that attack, many people were killed including my wife's sister's daughter and grandchild and the daughter's husband was wounded”.

ITJP WITNESS 77

“I was present when the Security Forces launched a Multi Barrelled Rocket Launcher attack on the civilians in the No Fire Zone who were near the junction and the former school and the makeshift hospital called Vallipunam Hospital. It had formerly been a school. I saw many dead and wounded civilians.”

ITJP WITNESS 65

“I was at the Vallipunam Hospital shortly after the Sri Lankan Army shelled it and killed and

wounded civilians in the hospital, including a close friend of my sister's”.

ITJP WITNESS 60

UN SATELLITE ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE

- 2 impact craters in the hospital compound
- 4 rooftop impacts on 3 buildings
- 1 building partial destroyed
- 8 buildings totally destroyed
- 50 additional artillery impact sites within a 1km radius of the hospital, an area designated by the Government as an “additional buffer zone”.



UNITED NATIONS SATELLITE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT (21 JANUARY – 5 FEBRUARY 2009)

- at least 10 primary buildings severely damaged or destroyed
- 20 auxiliary buildings severely damaged or destroyed
- at least 30 rooftop impact craters identified, consistent with the use of artillery fire⁴.

“While I was there, the Security Forces shelled the PTK Hospital. I could hear the explosions coming from the area of the hospital. Civilians who were running towards us from PTK said they had shelled the hospital that is why they had come from there. The drones were there in the sky.”

ITJP WITNESS 68



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“On 22 April ...in Valayanmadam [Hospital] at 9.30 in the morning I was in the operating theatre, when I heard the launch of artillery. Then I heard the shell open overhead. We all took cover and hit the floor. It was a cluster shell that had exploded overhead. One of the cluster shells had lodged in the roof of the operating theatre but had not exploded. I went outside to see that Dr. Sivamanoharan was lying on the ground at the door to the operating theatre. ...There were many people wounded in this attack.”

ITJP WITNESS 55



Two makeshift hospitals operated in schools in Mullivaikkal and then just one, which stopped functioning on 14 May 2009.

THE HOSPITAL WAS REPEATEDLY SHELLED BY THE SRI LANKAN MILITARY.

- Between 8 and 12 May 2009: the hospital was shelled on several occasions during intense daily bombardment by army artillery, the air force and the navy⁸.
- 8 a.m., 12 May, shells fired by the Sri Lankan Army fell directly in front of the admission ward of the facility, killing at least 20 people⁹.
- “Patients were lying outside in the sand due to a lack of beds, and bodies were decomposing in the heat¹⁰.”
- “There were so many dead bodies



Putumattalan lay within the second “No Fire Zone” which was unilaterally declared by the Government of Sri Lanka from 12 February 2009. At least three hundred thousand Tamil civilians flocked to the 14 square kilometer narrow spit of sandy land, thinking they would be safe there. They were driven into the area by the shelling of government forces advancing from all sides. Conditions were appalling in the scorching heat, with food and medicine short. The area was very densely packed with families sheltering in flimsy tents, digging bunkers where possible in the sandy terrain or constructing them with improvised sand bags stitched out of old saris.

“I know that many of these Kfir attacks were on civilian targets because I would often either go to the site of the attack and help load wounded to take to the hospital, or

that they could not be separated. There were pieces of bodies everywhere¹¹.”

UN SATELLITE IMAGERY¹²

- At least 8 separate impact craters were identified on the roofs of 4 hospital buildings
- At least 2 mortar impact craters were identified in the adjacent compound of the primary healthcare facility.

“Multiple witnesses described scenes of devastation, with hundreds of bodies of people killed by shelling scattered across areas within the No Fire Zones. Entire families had

I would be at the hospital and see them brought in. The wounds they suffered were not gunshot wounds but were bad blast wounds from shrapnel. Often these wounds were deep jagged, and often amputations or wounds that led to amputations.”

ITJP WITNESS 59 (ICRC employee)

“There was continuous shelling for over two hours. I remember observing that the shells had come from quite a long distance away. I could also tell by the noise. The shells had come from the Security Forces side.”

ITJP WITNESS 155

“The dead were under tents and many wounded civilians were outside on the ground because the hospital was overflowing with wounded.”

ITJP WITNESS 42

THE HOSPITAL WAS REPEATEDLY SHELLED BY THE SRI LANKAN MILITARY.

- 9 February and 20 April 2009¹⁴: multiple incidents of shelling of Putumattalan hospital and the adjacent United Nations hub.
- corroborated by satellite imagery¹⁵.
- cluster munitions allegedly used¹⁶ and RPG’s fired from such close range that the fire was indiscriminate.

“GPS coordinates of the hospital and the United Nations hub were communicated to the Sri Lankan security forces who were positioned approximately one kilometre away across the lagoon, and could see the hospital and United Nations hub with the naked eye¹⁷”.



¹ OISL, para 796

² OISL, paras 822-824

³ OISL, para 822

⁴ OISL, para 830

⁵ OISL, para 802

⁶ OISL, para 804

⁷ OISL, para 808

⁸ OISL, para 878

⁹ OISL, para 879

¹⁰ OISL, para 867

¹¹ OISL, para 880

¹² OISL, para 871

¹³ OISL, para 885

¹⁴ OISL, para 843

¹⁵ OISL, para 849

¹⁶ OISL, para 850

¹⁷ OISL, para 840