



GLOBAL ACTION TO PREVENT WAR

A COALITION-BUILDING EFFORT TO PREVENT WAR, GENOCIDE, AND INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT

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A Call to Action - Stop the Unfolding Humanitarian Crisis in Sri Lanka

"We cannot stress enough the importance of an immediate pause to allow the displaced to leave before thousands more are killed. The UN and international donors must put pressure on both parties to end this major humanitarian catastrophe." Amnesty International

As many of you already know, the North East Wannu region of Sri Lanka is an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe with the loss of thousands of lives and lack of medical care, food and shelter for over 200,000 civilians trapped in the conflict zone. Further, heavy military engagement between the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has confined the largely ethnic Tamil population to a 35 square km area on the coast, with both LTTE controlled areas and government-designated 'safe zones' receiving heavy air and artillery barrages.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted that 2,800 civilians have been killed and over 7,000 injured since January 20th with a large majority of the casualties being women and children. With the fighting continuing unabated, both sides to the conflict are creating a humanitarian crisis with flagrant disregard for the civilians caught in the crossfire. Independent sources confirm that the LTTE is preventing civilians from leaving the area and have renewed child soldier recruitment and forced labor practices.

For its part, the government of Sri Lanka continues to disregard the well-being of its own citizens through protracted military engagements without negotiating a ceasefire or truce that could allow displaced persons to be evacuated. In September 2008, the Sri Lankan government expelled UN organizations and international humanitarian agencies. This absence of international agencies has removed the capacity for independent assessments on human rights abuses and also left tens of thousands without adequate medicine, food and shelter. Further, restriction on food envoys and medical supplies has led to inhumane conditions in makeshift hospitals and needless deaths.

Over 50,000 civilians have fled to government-designated 'safe zones' only to find themselves subject to heavy bombing and shelling. Dr Thurairaja Varatharajah, chief of a makeshift hospital in the conflict zone confirmed that "165 injured people are in hospital, 54 dead," after shelling in the so-called safe zone on Wednesday March 25th (sources were unable to confirm which side fired the shells). Civilians who manage to exit areas of fighting, often injured and exhausted are then faced with the ordeal of security at government check points, artillery bombardment and restriction of movement in heavily fortified sites often with inadequate food or facilities.

The Secretariat of Global Action to Prevent War calls on its partner organizations, other NGOs and concerned individuals to lend organizational support and resources in calling for the following demands:

- **That the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE must negotiate a cease fire to allow the 200,000 displaced persons who are trapped in the East Wannu conflict area to move to areas of safety.**
- **That the Sri Lankan government must do all it can to ensure designated 'safe zones' are free of artillery bombardment to allow civilians to seek shelter and safety.**
- **That the Sri Lankan government must create a humanitarian corridor and allow full access for UN and humanitarian agencies to deliver aid, especially food, shelter and medical care.**
- **That the Security Council must demand a full briefing on the situation in Sri Lanka and call for an immediate truce.**

The Secretariat supports these and related Amnesty International recommendations to the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE, the international donor community and the Security Council. Please find attached a more detailed brief by Amnesty. We urge you to join us in bringing a stop to this unfolding humanitarian tragedy.

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