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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
United Nations Office, 777 UN Plaza, 6 Floor,
New York, NY 100017, USA
T: +1 212 867 8878 F: +1 212 370 0183
www.amnesty.org

The situation in Sri Lanka

The situation in Sri Lanka has gravely deteriorated over the weekend and the appalling situation in the conflict zone must now receive the Council's full and immediate attention.

As you are aware, this weekend at least 430 civilians, including more than 100 children, have reportedly been killed after two days of heavy bombardment of the two square kilometre area designated as a "Safe Zone" by the Sri Lankan army. The United Nations Spokesperson in Colombo has warned that the "bloodbath scenario has become a reality". The Sri Lankan government has denied responsibility for the shelling, accusing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the latest killings of hundreds of civilians. However, the government persists in its refusal to allow any independent observers, including from the United Nations, to verify its claim by granting them unhindered access to the area. This blocking of access, combined with previous breaches of the government's promises not to resort to the use of heavy artillery, undermine the credibility of its denial of responsibility for the shelling.

What is not disputed is that large numbers of civilians are now being killed and denied the most basic protection and humanitarian assistance in breach of international humanitarian law. All this happens while the Security Council stands idly by. Humanitarian organizations have no or at most heavily restricted access to the area. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is unable to evacuate the many hundreds of wounded in the "Safe Zone". There is a severe risk that the fighting will intensify further in the coming days and result in a humanitarian and human rights catastrophe on the Security Council's watch.

There is growing evidence that both sides in this conflict are committing violations of international law, including war crimes. According to witnesses, the LTTE have used civilians as human shields, recruited child soldiers and shot at civilians wishing to flee the fighting. The Sri Lankan forces have used heavy artillery which under the circumstances – used in a very densely populated area – amounts to indiscriminate attacks. The government has denied the provision of adequate humanitarian assistance, also in violation of international law.

The Security Council, which has repeatedly emphasized the need to protect civilians and confirmed the international community's responsibility to protect, can no longer remain silent about the humanitarian and human crisis in Sri Lanka. The Council must convene without any further delay to discuss the latest disturbing developments and immediately require that attacks on civilians by the Sri Lankan army or the LTTE be stopped; that the LTTE allow all civilians to leave the conflict area; and that the Sri Lankan government provide immediate access to humanitarian agencies and international monitors.

The Council must also require immediate implementation of the Sri Lankan government's promises to the UN Secretary-General to allow a UN humanitarian assessment mission to the conflict area without any further delay.

Finally, the Council must recall, in unambiguous terms, that alleged perpetrators of grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including war crimes, must be held individually responsible under international law. Given the mounting evidence of serious violations of international law, the Council should establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate serious violations by all parties in recent months, or request the Human Rights Council to establish such a Commission.

Amnesty International appreciates your urgent attention to the matters raised in this letter and will be glad to provide further information.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan
Secretary General