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## **UN report on Sri Lanka conflict must be made public**

A UN report on accountability for war crimes committed in the Sri Lankan armed conflict must be made public, Amnesty International said today as a panel of experts submits their findings to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

“Sri Lankans must be allowed to see the panel’s findings. The report concerns a critical period in their recent history and they deserve to read it in full,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director.

“Ban Ki-moon said that ‘accountability is an essential foundation for durable peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka’. He must stick to his word - accounting for violations committed in the recent conflict is the first step to future reconciliation”.

The UN Panel of Experts was appointed in June 2010 to advise the Secretary General on accountability issues relating to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law alleged in the final stages of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, which ended in May 2009.

The panel was also asked to recommend a course of action that would ensure accountability, in line with a joint commitment made by President Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka and Ban Ki-moon on his visit to Sri Lanka in May 2009.

Amnesty International has called on the UN to launch an independent international investigation into alleged crimes, which include the killing of more than 10,000 civilians; the LTTE’s use of civilians as human shields and conscription of child soldiers; Sri Lankan army shelling of areas densely populated by civilians; and severe deprivation of food, water and medical care for people trapped by fighting.

The Sri Lankan Government protested appointment of the UN Panel as “uncalled for and unwarranted” and refused to fully cooperate.

“The panel’s work on accountability issues in Sri Lanka should mark the beginning, not the end, of a process of accounting for violations” said Sam Zarifi.

For decades, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) systematically targeted civilians, launched suicide attacks at buses and railway stations, assassinated politicians and critics and recruited child soldiers.

Sri Lankan government forces and their armed affiliates also acted with impunity, engaging in extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torturing those suspected of links to the LTTE.

“Impunity for violations has been the rule throughout Sri Lanka’s long civil war. The way to turn a new page in the country’s history and restore public confidence is to deliver truth and justice,” said Sam Zarifi.

“By publicizing the panel of expert’s report, and moving toward an independent, international accountability mechanism, the UN would send a strong message that international law is relevant, and would reinforce trends of accountability for human rights violations globally.”

## **BACKGROUND**

The humanitarian crisis caused by the Sri Lankan armed conflict escalated in the final months of fighting, when some 300,000 displaced civilians were trapped between the two sides.

Amnesty International has received multiple, credible allegations that the LTTE forcibly placed civilians in the line of fire and shot those who tried to escape during the final days of the conflict. Amnesty International also received credible information about violations of international law by Sri Lankan government forces. The Sri Lankan government declared “No Fire Zones” to allow civilians moving along with the LTTE to avoid the fighting, but these densely populated zones were heavily bombarded by government forces artillery.

In 2008, the government blocked access to areas of the north under LTTE control for aid workers, journalists and independent observers, thereby blocking proper monitoring of the deteriorating conditions.

The Sri Lankan government consistently misrepresented the scale of the crisis, claiming as late as February 2009 that there were only “between 50,000 – 70,000” civilians trapped in the combat zone, meaning the humanitarian response for those civilians trapped in the conflict was drastically inadequate.

After the end of the conflict, 300,000 people were detained for months in military-run displacement camps, as Sri Lankan authorities obstructed international human rights protection work in an effort to contain a perceived security threat from LTTE. Obstructions have since been lifted but thousands of people remain in the camps.

Thousands of suspected LTTE members remain arbitrarily detained without charge in what the state refers to as “rehabilitation camps.”

The authorities’ refusal to acknowledge and investigate allegations of violations has already contributed to lawlessness in Sri Lanka.

In late 2010, reports of abductions, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in northern Sri Lanka increased. Victims include returnees who had been displaced by the armed conflict.

## **VIDEO MATERIAL:**

Promo (1 min)

ENGLISH <https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=130853>

FRENCH <https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=131082>

Film (10 min)

ENGLISH <https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=130853>

FRENCH <https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=131083>