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Sri Lanka: Civilian casualties unacceptable

Amnesty International condemned today's assassination of the Sri Lankan Minister of Industries, Mr C.V. Gooneratne, and an estimated 15 other civilians in a suicide bomb attack at Ratmalana in the minister's home constituency, about 15 kilometres south of Colombo.

The attack was reported to have been carried out by a male suicide bomber, thought to have been a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He approached Mr Gooneratne during a parade to mark War Heroes' Day held to honour security forces personnel killed in fighting with the LTTE in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The Deputy Mayor of Dehiwala - Mount Lavinia, Mr S. Anura Silva, and Mr Tilak Aponsu, a member of the Moratuwa Urban Council, were among the other civilians killed in the blast. Sixty people were also injured.

Amnesty International has today written to the LTTE London office condemning the attack and appealing for an immediate halt to attacks on civilians.

"While the parade may have been in honour of the security forces, that does not mean that those participating in it can be considered to be combatants. The large majority of those killed were civilians and their killing was in violation of international humanitarian law", the organization said in its letter addressed to Anton Balasingham, the most

senior representative of the LTTE outside Sri Lanka, currently based in London.

Amnesty International has repeatedly appealed to the LTTE in the past to respect the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law which requires that the lives of civilians and those not taking part in the conflict should be protected at all times.

Background

Fighting between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army in the northern Jaffna peninsula has recently escalated following a major offensive launched by the LTTE on 22 April in the Jaffna peninsula. The LTTE is fighting for an independent state called "Eelam" in the north and east of the country.

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