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Sri Lanka: Immediate humanitarian truce needed so trapped civilians can reach safety

Amnesty International calls on the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to declare an immediate humanitarian truce so an estimated 100,000 desperate civilians caught in the middle of the conflict zone can leave for safety.

An official two day ceasefire between the Sri Lankan military and the Tamil Tigers expired yesterday, however Amnesty International contacted two medical professionals working in a health facility in the no - fire zone who described a scene of chaos. Urgent humanitarian aid is needed as reports emerge that food and medical supplies are running low.

One medical worker reports that 92 injured civilians have been brought to the hospital today and fighting is intensifying. Another medical worker reported 75 casualties had arrived at the hospital yesterday with gun shot wounds and at least 12 civilians were killed. Medical supplies are running low and the hospital had run out of anaesthetic, surgical blades and basic medications.

Amnesty International is unable to verify these reports as the conflict zone has, in effect, been sealed off by the Sri Lankan government denying aid workers and independent human rights observers access to the area. The UN reported in March that more than 2,800 civilians have been killed and more than 7,000 injured since the beginning of the year.

The UN reports that Tamil Tiger fighters killed six civilians trying to flee the conflict zone during the ceasefire.

“An urgent humanitarian pause must be implemented immediately. Thousands of civilians are in grave danger from the continuing fighting and are in fear for their lives. The government of Sri Lanka needs to allow independent monitors to ensure that civilians feel safe to come out of the Tamil Tiger controlled areas. The Tamil Tigers must also ensure that civilians are not being used as a buffer against government forces”, said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Director.