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Sri Lanka: Urgent need for human rights protection

As the war between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) reaches its final hours and the humanitarian crisis unfolds, Amnesty International is calling for key steps to be adopted to ensure civilians and captured fighters are protected.

“The Sri Lankan government must ensure that its forces fully respect international law, including all provisions relating to protecting civilians from the effect of hostilities,” said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International’s Asia Pacific Director. “The government should accept the surrender of any LTTE fighter who wants to surrender and treat humanely LTTE fighters who have laid down their arms. In turn, the LTTE must also protect civilians and any Sri Lankan soldier they take prisoner.”

There are more than 200,000 displaced people, including approximately 80,000 children, who need relief but also protection from abuses in Sri Lanka.

Amnesty International calls on the Sri Lankan government:

- To allow full access to national and international humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to all those in need and facilitate their operations.
- To allow immediate and unfettered access to national and international independent observers to monitor the situation and provide a safeguard against human rights violations, including torture or other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances.
- To take measures to protect displaced people, including putting in place immediately a proper registration process, as a key safeguard against abuses such as enforced disappearances.

“In addition, the international community must require the prompt deployment of international monitors to be stationed in critical locations, including registration and screening points, displacement camps and places of detention,” said Sam Zarifi.

Amnesty International is supporting the convening of a special session of the Human Rights Council to sustain attention to the evolving situation in Sri Lanka and is calling for the United Nations to immediately establish an international commission of inquiry.

“The commission should investigate allegations of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by all warring parties in the course of the conflict and make recommendations on the best way to ensure full accountability,” said Sam Zarifi.