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Sri Lanka: End twenty years of impunity

The Sri Lankan government's failure to deliver justice for serious human rights violations over the past twenty years has trapped the country in a vicious cycle of abuse and impunity, according to a report published by Amnesty International today.

Amnesty International's report, *Twenty Years of Make-Believe: Sri Lanka's Commissions of Inquiry*, documents the failure of successive Sri Lankan governments to provide accountability for serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, killings, and torture.

Amnesty International calls on the government to use the opportunity created by the end of military operations against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to provide accountability for serious violations and abuses committed by both sides during the last months of fighting which cost thousands of lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

"As the Sri Lankan people contend with the most recent abuses committed by both sides of the recent conflict, particularly during the last few months of the fighting, the reality is that they have been haunted by injustice and impunity for years," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director. "If communities that have been torn apart by decades of violence and impunity are to be reconciled, the Sri Lankan government should initiate internal reforms and seek international assistance to prevent ongoing violations and ensure real accountability for past abuses."

As an immediate priority, Amnesty International is calling for the establishment of an independent international commission to investigate allegations of serious violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law by both the Sri Lankan forces and the Tamil Tigers in the recent military hostilities.

"The Sri Lankan authorities have had little success in providing accountability for abuses against civilians committed by the LTTE; they are even less likely to effectively investigate and prosecute their own forces for violations of human rights and humanitarian law," Sam Zarifi said.

Ad hoc commissions of inquiry set up by the Sri Lankan government have lacked any real credibility and have delayed criminal investigations, according to Amnesty International, who accused the government of failing to protect victims and witnesses.

Requests for an independent investigation into violations in the context of the recent military conflict have been brushed off, in spite of a 23 May joint statement by the Sri Lankan President and United Nations

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stating that: “The Government will take measures to address those grievances”.

“Given the scale of the problem of impunity in Sri Lanka, accountability can only be achieved with the active commitment of the Sri Lankan government, supported by systematic and sustained international human rights monitoring and technical assistance,” Sam Zarifi said.

To address the need for broader human rights protection and reform, Amnesty International also calls for the establishment of a UN human rights monitoring presence under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate reported abuses and assist Sri Lanka’s national institutions to deliver justice.

To view the full report visit: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/005/2009/en>