

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Sri Lanka: Amnesty International calls for respect for human rights in escalation of violence

Amnesty International is calling for full respect for international humanitarian and human rights law in Sri Lanka following a rapid escalation of violence in the country during the past two weeks.

Several army personnel and civilians were killed and Army Commander Lt Gen Fonseka was severely injured in a suicide bomb attack at Army Headquarters in Colombo on 25 April. This bombing has been attributed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The suicide bombing and retaliatory action in the form of aerial bombardments and shelling by the Sri Lanka joint armed forces in Trincomalee district against LTTE positions may signal a return to full-scale war which would be likely to have devastating consequences for the human rights of civilians in Sri Lanka.

It has been reported that at least twelve civilians were killed during the attacks and counter-attacks in LTTE controlled areas in Muttur East in Trincomalee district in the past two days, although this has not been independently verified.

Following a bomb blast which killed five people in a market in Trincomalee town on 12 April, over twenty Tamil and Muslim civilians were killed by Sinhalese in what appeared to be retaliatory attacks; dozens of homes and businesses were destroyed and several thousand people displaced. Concerns have been expressed about lack of timely intervention by the security forces in order to protect civilians.

During the past two weeks over eighty people including civilians have been killed in violations of the Ceasefire Agreement.

Amnesty International appeals to the parties to take all possible measures to minimize harm to civilians and adhere to human rights and international humanitarian law, which prohibit murder or violence to those taking no active part in hostilities. Both parties must ensure that their forces do not target civilians or carry out indiscriminate attacks.

Background

Over 60,000 people have died in two decades of conflict in Sri Lanka. Four attempts at peace talks have ended in failure. In February 2002 the government and the LTTE entered into a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and held a series of peace negotiations, with the Norwegian government acting as facilitator. These broke down in April 2003 when the LTTE pulled out of the talks. The government and the LTTE met to discuss the implementation of the CFA in Geneva on 22 and 23 February. Both sides agreed to uphold the commitments made in the CFA, and to meet again in April. However, since then the LTTE has put off holding further talks indefinitely citing logistical and security considerations.