

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Sri Lanka: Amnesty International calls for urgent action to protect civilians**

Amnesty International is alarmed that escalating fighting in Sri Lanka has resulted in the death and injury of scores of civilians, the displacement of more than 160,000 people, and the destruction of homes, schools, and places of worship. The organisation is dismayed that neither the government security forces nor the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) appear to be taking adequate precautions to protect civilian lives. Even when serious violations of international humanitarian law are reported, both sides trade accusations and counter-accusations rather than take steps to address or put a halt to violations.

Amnesty International is concerned by the extent and seriousness of the violations reported, the lack of adequate protection for civilians, and restrictions on access to the worst affected areas. Persistent uncertainty about what has actually occurred and who is responsible for alleged war crimes and other violations of international law is fueling fear and panic among the civilian population.

Amnesty International believes that the establishment of a strong and effective international human rights monitoring operation is urgently needed to respond to the dramatic deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation. Such a monitoring mission must have the full cooperation of both the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, and the support of the United Nations and its member states.

Recent incidents recorded by Amnesty International that demand further investigation by independent human rights experts include:

On 3 August, at least 17 civilians, including children, were killed and 80 injured when four schools in Muttur were hit by shelling, according to reports.

On or around 4 August, hundreds of Muslim civilians fleeing the fighting in Muttur were diverted by the LTTE into an area under its control. The LTTE has said it was providing safe passage for the group to move away from the battle areas. An unknown number of Muslim men were allegedly separated from the group and taken away with their hands tied. Some reports indicated that the men were executed. Others among the group of displaced people were reported to have been caught in the crossfire between the LTTE and government forces, and a number of them reportedly died or were injured.

On 6 August, the bodies of 15 aid workers with the French aid agency Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim, or ACF) were discovered lying face-down on the front lawn of ACF's Muttur office, with bullet wounds indicating that they had been shot at close range. The bodies of two more staff members were found on 8 August in a car nearby, indicating that they may have been killed while trying to escape. The government has invited an Australian forensic expert to assist with the investigation, but has prevented international truce monitors from visiting the site.

Late on the night of 8 August, a roadside bomb reportedly hit an ambulance killing five people – a medical doctor, his wife, two nurses and the driver of the ambulance. The incident occurred in

LTTE-controlled territory near the village of Nedunkerny, in Vavuniya district. The government has accused the LTTE of responsibility for the attack, while the LTTE has blamed the Sri Lanka Army's "Deep Penetration Unit", which it says operates within LTTE-controlled territory.

On 10 August, renewed aerial bombardment by the Sri Lankan air force of LTTE-controlled areas in Trincomalee district reportedly resulted in a number of civilian casualties. The LTTE claimed that at least 50 civilians were killed and more than 200 wounded in aerial attacks on populated areas. A military spokesman told the Associated Press news agency that the army does not target civilians but added that the LTTE were "known for using human shields and they placed their gun positions around civilian villages." Casualty figures and competing accounts of the bombardment could not be independently verified.

On 13 August, rockets and artillery shells reportedly hit the St. Philip Mary Church and surrounding homes in Allaipiddy on Kayts islet, just off the northwestern coast of the Jaffna Peninsula, killing at least 15 civilians and wounding 54. There were conflicting reports as to whether the shells were fired by government forces or by the LTTE.

On 14 August, as many as 51 teenage girls were reportedly killed and more than 100 wounded when Sri Lankan air forces dropped between 12 to 16 bombs on a compound in the northern district of Mullaitivu, in LTTE-controlled territory. UNICEF reported that the victims had come from various schools in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts to attend course in first aid. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, an international team of experts charged with monitoring the compliance of both parties with the 2002 ceasefire agreement, said the target of the air strikes was a former orphanage with no evidence of military installations or weapons nearby. A national security spokesperson said the air force had conducted air strikes on an LTTE training base at Puthukudiyurippu in Mullaitivu, and that "between 50 and 60 young LTTE terrorist cadres were killed and many were injured."

There also have been a series of attacks in the capital, Colombo, the nature and targets of which strongly suggest the involvement of the LTTE.

On 8 August, a car bomb attack on S. Sivathasan, a senior member of the Eelam People's Democratic Party and former Member of Parliament, killed the politician's bodyguard and a three-year-old child who happened to be standing near the roadside. S. Sivathasan and five other civilians were injured in the blast.

On 12 August, unidentified gunmen assassinated Ketheshwaran Loganathan, the deputy secretary general of the government's Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) and former director of the Colombo-based Centre for Policy Alternatives, a research centre that specializes in conflict resolution and good governance.

On 14 August, a bomb hit a convoy carrying the Pakistan's High Commissioner Bashir Wali Mohamed; the ambassador escaped without injury, but at least seven people were killed in the blast including four military bodyguards and three civilian bystanders.

Amnesty International appeals to both the government and the LTTE to comply with international humanitarian law, which prohibits murder or other violence to those taking no active part in hostilities. As a matter of urgency, both parties to the conflict must ensure that their forces comply with the principle of distinction between civilian and military targets and do not target civilians or carry out indiscriminate attacks.