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Sri Lanka: Human rights is the issue, not cricket

The distortion in Sri Lanka of Amnesty International's campaign "Play by the Rules" is a ploy to distract attention from the increasingly desperate plight of hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankan people.

"We are concerned at abuses by all parties to the conflict -- civilians are killed, abducted and forcibly disappeared every day at the hands of government forces, Tamil Tigers, the Karuna faction and other armed groups," said Purna Sen, Asia Pacific Director at Amnesty International. "Let us be clear -- no side in this conflict has anything to be complacent about. On the contrary, all parties are breaching international law by failing to protect civilians."

Increasing abductions, illegal killings and child recruitment in Sri Lanka are all going on unchecked and victims do not receive justice. The intensified fighting over the last year has forced over 300,000 people to flee their homes. At least 1000 people have been forcibly disappeared since the beginning of 2006.

"The situation in Sri Lanka has become so desperate for local people that urgent action is needed. Civilians desperately need better protection and a key goal of our campaign is to press for independent human rights monitors to investigate human rights abuses and identify the perpetrators, so they can be brought to justice," said Purna Sen.

"Through our campaign we are drawing attention to the increasing human rights abuses committed against civilians by the Sri Lankan government, the Tamil Tigers, the Karuna faction and other armed groups. The lives of hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans are being affected -- our campaign is about these people, not the Sri Lankan cricket team."

"The Sri Lankan government is failing in its responsibility to protect civilians; there have been over 4000 deaths since early 2006 while this government has been in power. Reported accusations that Amnesty International has 'tarnished the country's image' do not bear scrutiny -- the authorities need to look closer to home," continued Purna Sen.

"The Tamil Tigers have killed hundreds of civilians in summary executions and indiscriminate bomb attacks. They are continuing to forcibly recruit child soldiers and have even prevented civilians from fleeing the fighting in the North and East."

"It is a small step for all parties to the conflict to agree to allow access to independent human rights monitors but it would make a huge difference to the lives of ordinary Sri Lankans."

"Cricket is a great game and the Sri Lankan people are rightly proud of their ethnically diverse national cricket team, which symbolises the best of Sri Lanka," said Purna Sen. "But hundreds of thousands of people have had to flee the fighting to live in temporary shelter -- and so are not able to live in safety let alone watch cricket."

Amnesty International emphasised that it was not calling for a boycott of the Sri Lankan cricket team or Sri Lankan sports overall and is not campaigning in any stadiums in the West Indies.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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