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Sri Lanka: Attacks against civilians must cease

In the wake of this morning's suicide bombing, Amnesty International calls again on all parties in the conflict in Sri Lanka to comply with their obligations under international law to protect civilians.

A suicide bomber killed at least 27 people, including retired Major General Janaka Perera, the United National Party leader (the country's main opposition party) of the North Central Provincial council, in northern Sri Lanka. The explosion occurred in a civilian area of Anuradhapura town during the opening of the United National Party office. Civilian deaths included MTV reporter, Rashmi Mohammed, aged 31, with at least 60 other people injured, including a child.

The government has accused the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of the attack. The upsurge in hostilities between government security forces and the LTTE in the last year has seen a dramatic rise in attacks by the LTTE targeting the civilian population. The LTTE has not responded to the current allegation.

All parties to the war in Sri Lanka are legally bound to obey the rules of International humanitarian law, also known as the laws of armed conflict or the laws of war. These rules have been developed in order to mitigate the effects of such conflicts. They limit the means and methods of conducting military operations. They oblige combatants to spare those who are not taking active part in the hostilities, such as unarmed civilians and combatants who have been wounded or captured.

Amnesty International calls on the LTTE and government security forces to immediately and unconditionally stop any direct or indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Such attacks are prohibited at all times and constitute war crimes and urges the international community to support the call to establish an independent, international monitoring presence on the ground without delay.

Background

Since the end of the ceasefire in January this year, the Sri Lankan military has launched a major offensive to reclaim areas of the north and east previously controlled by the LTTE. Restricted access for the media and independent monitors to conflict-affected areas means it is impossible to verify the extent of casualties.

As a result of recent fighting over 220,000 people are displaced in the Wanni in northern Sri Lanka including 30,000 schoolchildren. On 9 September the government issued an order for United Nations (UN) and non-governmental aid workers to leave the war-torn northern Wanni

region. Since 29 September the government has allowed some international UN workers to accompany food convoys into the Wanni but humanitarian access remains limited.

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