

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned non-governmental organisations working in or on Sri Lanka, write to urge you to act immediately in the face of the humanitarian tragedy now unfolding in that country.

The situation in the Vanni area of Sri Lanka has reached a point of extreme urgency. Tens of thousands of civilians, possibly well over 100,000, remain trapped in the so-called 'safe zone,' an area not much larger than Manhattan's Central Park, held as human shields by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and exposed to indiscriminate shelling by the Sri Lankan military.

According to available estimates, including from United Nations staff on the ground, as many as 5000 civilians have died in the fighting since mid-January, including at least 500 children. Dozens more are dying each day, and the remaining civilians are exposed to severe shortages of food, water, and medical treatment. With the government of Sri Lanka poised to launch a 'final' offensive to 'finish off' the LTTE, John Holmes, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, has stated that "a bloodbath... seems an increasingly real possibility."

The United Nations Security Council and the UN Secretary-General must take the following specific steps to live up to their respective responsibilities to protect civilians and prevent mass atrocities:

**The Security Council** should formally include Sri Lanka on its agenda and agree on a statement that:

- Calls on the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to cease hostilities with immediate effect and to agree to a humanitarian pause of at least two weeks, in order to permit the reopening of access routes for food, water and medical supplies;
- Demands that the LTTE cease forced recruitment and allow those civilians who wish to leave to do so;
- Urges the Sri Lankan authorities to allow international monitors in the conflict area and especially in 'reception centres,' to reassure both fleeing civilians and surrendered LTTE fighters that they will be treated according to international standards;
- Requests that the UN system conduct a needs assessment and accelerate contingency planning in the event of a massive civilian exodus from the 'safe zone;'
- Calls on all member-states to step up pressure on the LTTE, by tightening restrictions on foreign financing and support for the Tamil Tigers and engaging vigorously with the Tamil diaspora;
- Creates an international commission of inquiry to investigate credible allegations of atrocity crimes and violations of the laws of war and declares that those most responsible for any preventable civilian carnage will be held accountable;
- Encourage its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to conduct a field mission to Sri Lanka.

**The Secretary-General** should:

- Speak out strongly and unambiguously in support of the above, including by personally backing the UN-estimated figures of war-affected persons, including the number of casualties;
- Ensure interagency coordination during the needs assessment and contingency planning processes;
- If necessary, use his powers under Article 99 of the UN Charter and bring the situation in Sri Lanka to the attention of the Security Council;
- Prepare to dispatch to Sri Lanka a high-level envoy as soon as a humanitarian pause is declared, to oversee any evacuation of civilians from the 'safe zone,' to serve as the point person for the UN system, and to ensure that the warring parties abide by international norms and obligations.

Signed,



Global Action to Prevent War



Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect



International Crisis Group



MEDACT



Minority Rights Group



Operation USA



Tearfund



World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy