

UN Security Council Press Conference on Sri Lanka
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
12 May 2009

UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, and Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger commented on the situation in Sri Lanka following an informal meeting on 11 May between eight UNSC members, humanitarian NGOs, and UN officials. Because of the informality of the meeting, there is no official record or statement.

UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband:

(...) In respect of the situation in the IDP camps, this remains a major concern, there is enormous strain on the civilians in the IDP camps, there is insufficient access either by humanitarian organisations or by the UN. We were also told about the continuing denial of visas and other permits for access around the country. We believe that access is absolutely vital for the UN and NGOs, but also for journalists if there is to be proper witness to the situation that afflicts the civilians in this country. It is also important to say that there is no doubt in anyone's mind that the LTTE are preventing civilians from leaving the No Fire Zone, consistent with their own murderous behaviour in the past.

I think it is also important that I say, on behalf of myself and the three European colleagues on the Security Council, that we have no doubt at all that the situation, the humanitarian situation, in Sri Lanka is something that the Security Council should address and I am going to invite my two colleagues to say a few words and then we are happy to take some questions.

Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger

Just to add what David Miliband said, I think we all are shocked about the news we have heard today from the NGOs and from OCHA. I think from the Austrian point of view, we are very much concerned about the situation today and I just would like to announce three points:

- first of all, I think we should ask the Government of Sri Lanka just to protect their people because it's an obligation in the framework of United Nations. They have to protect the life of the people and they have to try to get them out from the Fire Zone;
- just a second point is, I think, we have to concentrate in this moment to the situation in the camps. As we have heard, this is really a shocking situation and we should ask the Government of Sri Lanka just to let in the camps independent monitors, just to find out what's going on really in these camps; and
- thirdly, I think we all have to have a look to the future what could be the political solution and I think we should draw the attention also to this point of view because it will not end with military action. We have to think about the situation afterwards.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner

(...) David, he said very clearly the five points and the sixth point was demining. We were ready to help the people there and to help the Sri Lankan Government and the people to demine. Access to this upper part for UN Agencies, for NGOs with projects, giving food, giving medical

supplies, yes we were in agreement with the President himself but so what now?

Are we waiting all of us to the end of the bombing, to the end of any life, not only suffering, but any life in this pocket, of siege pocket, I am calling you because you are our friends to drive the attention of the international community to this part of the world. (...)

Q & A session

Question: What are your options now, just picking up on that question, are you going to try and force this onto the agenda of the UN Security Council and remind countries they have a **responsibility to protect**

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Bernard Kouchner: We are ready to talk to other colleagues and there is a special place right now to address them and to tell them what we have seen and what we are suffering of doing nothing against.

Question: Basically, can you explain us, what are the reasons of those who are against any Security Council actions? Who are they and what are they saying?

David Miliband: I think that is something that you'll have to address to others. I think the three of us can speak for ourselves; others can speak for themselves. We are clear that this is an issue that the UN Security Council should address. It involves major civilian loss of life and distress. It does have ramifications for the region and it involves the word of a member of the United Nations not to use heavy weaponry in the pursuit of its goals to suppress a terrorist organisation. Those are fundamental issues that we, as European members of the Security Council, do believe belongs here. (...)

Source: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/newsroom/latest-news/?view=PressS&id=17637502>