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The United Nations' top human rights official demanded Tuesday an independent investigation into atrocities allegedly committed by both sides in Sri Lanka's civil war.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay said at an emergency meeting of the Geneva-based U.N. Human Rights Council that tens of thousands of civilians had been killed or injured in intense fighting since December between the government and Tamil rebels, or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam.

A majority of the 47 countries on the council appeared unwilling to heed her appeal for a war crimes probe.()

"In no circumstances can the end justify the means," Pillay said. "There are strong reasons to believe that both sides have grossly disregarded the fundamental principle of the inviolability of civilians."

Sri Lankan Ambassador Dayan Jayatilleka said it is "outrageous" to suggest the government should be investigated along with the rebels, saying it was like asking the victorious allies of World War II to accept a war crimes tribunal for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.() Jayatilleka insisted that the conflict was a domestic matter in which other countries had no right to interfere, and he denounced the staging of the council meeting.

Pillay, other senior U.N. officials and rights groups have said that a team of independent investigators should examine claims that government forces shelled civilians that were allegedly being kept as human shields by the Tamil Tigers in the war that the rebels lost last week.

Sri Lanka, which has strong support in the 47-member council, proposed a resolution of its own stressing "the principle of noninterference in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of states."

The resolution, which has the support of China, Cuba, Pakistan and others, also urges the international community to cooperate with Colombo by providing it with more financial aid.

Switzerland, backed by European countries, Mauritius and Canada, proposed a resolution condemning the loss of life -- believed to have exceeded 7,000 in the last months of the war -- but stopped short of demanding a war crimes probe.()

Source: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/26/AR2009052603499.html>