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The cessation of the fighting in Sri Lanka marks the welcome end of a prolonged and brutal war. But it also creates two issues of immediate concern.

The first is the critical plight of the hundreds of thousands of civilians in the north and east of the country who have been victimized by the conflict.

The international community failed them during the fighting by falling short of its commitments under the **Responsibility to Protect** doctrine. It must not fail them again by leaving them to the tender mercies of a government that has been prepared to sacrifice civilians to gain military advantage.

Those stranded in makeshift camps for the displaced are in dire need of food, shelter and medical attention. Many have been displaced more than once, having fled the conflict in desperation only to find that it followed them. They are now far from home and left with nothing. It will require a sustained and organized effort to resettle them safely.

Many more have also been brutalized by one or both sides in the conflict, held by force and against their will as human shields by the ruthless Tamil Tigers and/or targeted by the indiscriminate shelling of government forces.

Now that the hostilities have ended, the Sri Lankan government must open up the country to international humanitarian workers to help domestic agencies deliver the aid that is urgently needed. Access must also be permitted to international human-rights monitors to assure that a world with every reason to be suspicious that the rights of Tamils will be respected.

The second issue is whether a government fresh from its victory in the field will take the high road and seek a lasting peace, or simply pretend that a military victory has solved the nation's problems. The defeat of the Tigers brings the possibility of a new beginning. Can a durable peace rise from the ashes left from decades of conflict? The answer depends on the willingness of the parties to accommodate their differences and on the openness of the Sinhalese majority to confront at long last the deep sense of grievance and inequality felt in the Tamil community.
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The Sri Lankan government must not assume that its military success means that the national fault lines have been healed. If a lasting peace is to be achieved, Tamil grievances must be addressed. A form of ruth and reconciliation process, adapted to the culture and circumstances of Sri Lanka, might also create a more constructive atmosphere.

The international community, through the United Nations and influential donor countries, must encourage a process to achieve a new beginning, or run the risk of watching Sri Lanka consumed by decades more of instability and violence.()

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