

TamilNet

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A group of 38 United States members of Congress sent a joint letter today to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and to the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Dr. Susan Rice, highlighting the humanitarian crisis faced by Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka, and expressing concern over conditions in the internment camps, calling for bringing the issue to the UN Security Council, and encouraging active U.S. leadership to bring about a long-delayed political settlement.

The diverse, bipartisan group of 38 Members of Congress was led by Congressman Jim Moran and included chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Congressman McGovern, leading Republican in the House on all human rights issues, Congressman Wolf, and ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia Congressman, Dan Burton.

We write with great concern regarding the grave humanitarian crisis in northern Sri Lanka. Human rights groups report that up to 200,000 civilians are trapped in the Vanni region, amid fighting between Sri Lankan Government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Most have been cut off from outside food and medical supplies for weeks, and their lives are threatened by the war and their resulting humanitarian needs. Human Rights Watch reports that 2,000 Tamil civilians have been killed since January, and 7,000 civilians have been wounded, the Congressional letter said.

Pointing out that Sri Lanka is currently on Red Alert for genocide the letter stated, while some would dispute the legal definitions of genocide at this time, there can be no doubt that ethnic-based violence is widespread in Sri Lanka, and Tamil noncombatants are deliberately victimized by Sri Lankan Government policies.

Our active leadership at this critical time can help save thousands of lives and make progress toward a sustainable political solution to end the horrific cycle of violence in the country. We urge you to continue to condemn all attacks against civilians by the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Both sides need to establish humanitarian corridors to allow noncombatants to travel freely and to receive humanitarian assistance. All UN agencies and aid workers, as well as journalists and human rights monitors, need to be granted access to the region, and we hope this can be arranged soon.

While calling for the internment centers masquerading as welfare villages to be brought under the administration of the United Nations agencies, the letter further said: We urge continued efforts to press other UN Security Council members to bring Sri Lanka's crisis to the agenda of the Security Council. ()

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