

The following joint statement was made on 15 April by the French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Bernard Kouchner and United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs David Milliband regarding the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka.

We welcomed President Rajapakse's announcement on 12 April of a pause in the Sri Lankan government's military offensive as a first step towards the protection of civilian life. But we are deeply concerned that there was no large scale movement of civilians away from the conflict area to safety as we had hoped to see, in the short period allowed for the pause. It is clear that the LTTE have been forcefully preventing civilians from leaving the conflict area and we deplore their determination to use civilians as a human shield. We do of course continue to call on the LTTE to renounce terrorism and lay down their arms as a necessary element for a long-term solution.

We urge President Rajapakse to announce a new pause. Democratic governments are rightly held to higher standards for civilian protection than terrorist organizations. We also urge the LTTE to allow civilians to move to safety. It is vital that a pause in the fighting should be long enough to give civilians the opportunity to leave the conflict area, and for the UN to build confidence amongst the population that they will be safe if they leave. Both sides must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and do all they can to protect civilians. This includes giving international humanitarian agencies unimpeded access to those affected by the fighting so that they can deliver adequate supplies of assistance. ()

Source: <https://pastel.diplomatie.gouv.fr/editorial/actual/ael2/bulletin.gb.asp?liste=20090416.gb.html>

The New York Times published an article on 16 April 2009 with commentary on the statement made by Ministers Milliband and Kouchner, as well as the open letter sent by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect to the UN Security Council. The article is linked here: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/17/world/asia/17lanka.html?_r=2&ref=global-home