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Responsibility to Protect-Engaging Civil Society

Web: www.responsibilitytoprotect.org

E-mail: info@responsibilitytoprotect.org

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I. Humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka

1. Sri Lanka: actions by Government forces, rebels possible war crimes UN rights chief UN News
13 March 2009

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said that certain actions undertaken by the Sri Lankan military and by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could constitute violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

We need to know more about what is going on, but we know enough to be sure that the situation is absolutely desperate, she said. The world today is ever-sensitive about such acts that could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. ()

The LTTE is believed to be continuing to hold civilians as human shields and shooting those trying to leave their control. Further, they are reportedly forcibly recruiting civilians, including children, as soldiers.

The brutal and inhuman treatment of civilians by the LTTE is utterly reprehensible, and should be examined to see if it constitutes war crimes, the High Commissioner said. ()

Ms. Pillay called on both the Government and the LTTE to immediately halt the fighting to allow all civilians to evacuate the conflict zone, urging Sri Lankan authorities to give UN and other independent agencies full access to accurately assess conditions.

Last week, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly deplored the mounting civilian death and

stressed the urgent need for the end of clashes. In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban repeated his call to the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to suspend hostilities for the purposes of allowing civilians to leave the conflict zone, and allowing immediate humanitarian access to them.

He appealed to the LTTE to take its weapons and fighters out of areas where there are many civilians, cooperate in humanitarian efforts and instantly end recruiting children, some as young as 13 years of age, as soldiers. In addition, he urged the Government to begin serious efforts to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict.

Source: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30175&Cr=sri+lanka&Cr1=>

2. US Senators call for immediate ceasefire, international oversight of detention camps
TamilNet
13 March 2009

A bipartisan group of seven senior U.S. Senators in a letter to Foreign Secretary Hilary Clinton blamed the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers for the "impending catastrophe," and said: "The situation in Sri Lanka is unacceptable and must be remedied as quickly as possible. We commend your recent statement with UK Foreign Minister David Milliband that called on the government and the LTTE to adhere to a ceasefire, allow access to humanitarian agencies, and resume political discussions to bring the long-standing ethnic conflict to an end. An enduring peace can be achieved only through a political solution that treats the Tamil minority as equal citizens under the law. Without such an agreement, the violence will only continue."

Full text of the letter: <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=28700>

3. Send Special UN envoy to Sri Lanka, urges Canadian opposition leader Michael Ignatieff
Michael Ignatieff
27 February 2009

Michael Ignatieff is the leader of the Canadian Liberal Party, and was a commissioner in the 2001 ICISS report on The Responsibility to Protect. The following press release urges UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon to send a special envoy to Sri Lanka to investigate the large scale loss of life and encourage inclusive political discussions.

Source: <http://tamilweek.com/news-features/archives/1518>

II. Indictment of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in Darfur

1. Arrest warrant for Sudan leader a 'milestone': Ex-UN official
Mike Blanchfield
Canwest News Service
4 March 2009

Canada's former United Nations ambassador Allan Rock called the arrest warrant issued Wednesday by the International Criminal Court against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes in Darfur "a significant milestone" in ending the impunity of abusive dictators.