

# PEOPLE FOR EQUALITY AND RELIEF IN LANKA

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## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Human Rights Groups Applaud Obama's Attention; Question Whether it is Too Little, Too Late**

Washington, DC May 14, 2009 – PEARL and HELP Advocates Sri Lanka applaud President Obama for making a statement regarding the ongoing bloodbath in Northern Sri Lanka, but appeal for further action to stop the ongoing bloodbath. The United Nations has documented over 6,000 civilian deaths and over 15,000 civilians injured in the conflict area since January 20; however this figure does not include over 1,400 civilians who were killed in government shelling over the weekend. Reports from the ground reflect the desperate nature of the situation for Tamil civilians under attack in the so-called "Safe Zone" and in the government-run internment camps.

"The Sri Lankan government is continuing its devastating attacks against already-suffering Tamil civilians in Northern Sri Lanka, despite statements of concern from the United States, UK, UN, India and others," said PEARL representative Arvind Suguness. "We commend President Obama for making a strong statement about this humanitarian tragedy, but we need more forceful action to stop Sri Lanka's genocide. The Sri Lankan government is intentionally targeting Tamil civilians as it attempts to end its war with the LTTE, and is committing genocide in the process. Last September, the Sri Lankan government expelled aid agencies and journalists from the conflict area to prevent the international community from witnessing the current massacres. As the government continues its attacks against Tamil civilians, hopes for a unified Sri Lanka disintegrate and its stability, along with the stability of the surrounding region, becomes increasingly threatened."

"PEARL welcomes President Obama's call for an immediate end to hostilities. However, President Obama's demand that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) lay down their arms is deeply concerning, because it sends the signal that it is acceptable for the Sri Lankan government to massacre thousands of civilians if it is under the pretext of fighting terror. The LTTE is a symptom of decades of institutionalized discrimination against Tamils in Sri Lanka, and the structural roots of Sri Lanka's conflict must be addressed to achieve a lasting peace," Suguness said. "President Obama's statement failed to emphasize that a military solution to this conflict will only further perpetuate this conflict and prevent a meaningful political solution that recognizes Tamil aspirations and their right to self-determination. Moreover, we must point out the danger in applying equal blame when the scale of atrocities is utterly disproportional."

PEARL and HELP Advocates Sri Lanka believe that the United States should immediately facilitate a ceasefire by imposing targeted sanctions against Sri Lankan officials such as Army General Sarath Fonseka and Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse – a U.S. green card holder and a U.S. citizen, respectively. The United States should lead efforts through the UN Security Council to invoke and implement the Responsibility to Protect to immediately deliver aid to Tamils – thousands of whom will die otherwise.

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**About PEARL, HELP Advocates Sri Lanka**

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People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL) is a DC-based human rights advocacy group composed of over 3,600 Americans and 4,300 international members concerned about the crisis in Sri Lanka. PEARL was formed in 2005 after a group of college students volunteered in Sri Lanka and were exposed firsthand to the stories of suffering there.

HELP Advocates Sri Lanka works on behalf of all the innocent civilians in Sri Lanka who are victims of the country's decades-long cycle of violent conflict and oppression. HELP is a U.S.-based grassroots advocacy organization committed to promoting and protecting Human rights, Equality and Lasting Peace in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has experienced a brutal ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese-dominated government and the Tamil minority, who have been discriminated against since Sri Lanka's independence. Over 125,000 lives have been lost in the conflict, of which the overwhelming majority is Tamil. For more information, visit [PEARLAction.org](http://PEARLAction.org) or [HELPAdvocates.org](http://HELPAdvocates.org).