



*Sangam*

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ASSOCIATION OF TAMILS OF SRI LANKA IN THE USA

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### **We Need to Know the Truth about Tamil Civilians in ‘No Fire Zone’**

The Sangam is deeply disturbed and concerned about the plight of the civilians who remain caught up in the Tamil enclave on the northeast coast of Sri Lanka, who remain under assault by the Sri Lankan armed forces. We urgently request that international assistance be sent immediately to care for the civilian casualties and to witness the slaughter that has occurred before all the evidence is destroyed.

Reports reaching us indicate that there have been over 20,000 civilian casualties in the last few days of fighting. Bodies are reported to be lying on the ground all over the Tamil enclave. However, only the Sri Lankan armed forces, the perpetrators of this atrocity, have access to the area. Since the deliberate killing of civilians is a war crime, we are convinced that the armed forces will be quickly hiding whatever evidence of these atrocities they can.

This is an URGENT APPEAL to the US, Indian and UN authorities to ensure, by whatever means necessary, that observers, journalists and humanitarian workers have access to the entire ‘No Fire Zone.’ It is imperative that such a large number of civilian casualties receive immediate assistance. It is imperative that the truth concerning the means used in this war be revealed before a cover-up is committed.

Until now the Sri Lankan Government (GoSL) has been able to conduct a “war without witnesses” under the pretext of ongoing hostilities. Now that the hostilities are over, the world owes it to the innocents to learn the truth. It is our belief that the entire area, along with much of the rest of the Tamil region, will be turned into a High Security Zone from which all but the military will be barred.

One year ago, there were more than 350,000 Tamil civilians in the Vanni, the area the armed forces have recently taken over. Almost 250,000 are currently registered as interred in camps on the outskirts of the Tamil areas. Another 80,000 are believed to be in transit out of the ‘No Fire Zone.’ That leaves at minimum **20,000 civilians unaccounted for.**

It is completely outside the norms of human behavior to deliberately annihilate large numbers of civilians in the course of military operations when other means are available. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Union have called for an inquiry into the possible commission of war crimes in the large-scale killing of Tamil civilians.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka have paid a heavy price for standing up for their rights and we hope that at this late hour, they will get the assistance they need and the justice they deserve.

Sincerely,

Americans for Peace in Sri Lanka  
Association of Sri Lankan Tamils in the USA  
HELP Advocates  
Tamils Against Genocide  
World Tamil Organization

cc: ICRC statement



18-05-2009 News release 09/104

Sri Lanka: ICRC makes urgent appeal for wounded to be given medical care  
Geneva (ICRC) – For nine consecutive days the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been pursuing efforts, so far without success, to reach the area of north-eastern Sri Lanka hard hit by fighting in recent weeks.

The ICRC has therefore been unable to obtain first-hand information about the needs of civilians and wounded people in the area. Although thousands of civilians have fled the conflict zone in the past days and weeks, the ICRC remains concerned about the wounded needing urgent medical care.

“Under international humanitarian law, the lives of all those who are not or are no longer fighting must be spared. Wounded and sick people must be collected and cared for immediately, and detainees must be treated humanely,” said the ICRC’s director of operations, Pierre Krähenbühl, from the ICRC’s headquarters in Geneva today. “This is all the more urgent since no humanitarian aid has reached those who need it for over a week.”

The ICRC has proposed to the authorities that it help evacuate any remaining civilians from the area where fighting has been taking place, care for the sick and wounded, and provide emergency assistance for the displaced. The ICRC will seize any opportunity that presents itself to enter the area and assess the situation.

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