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Tamil American Peace Initiative Commends the UN for Sri Lanka Rights Abuse Panel

The Tamil American Peace Initiative (TAPI) applauds the UN for appointing a panel to advise on war crimes and human rights violations in Sri Lanka. After months of protest by the Sri Lankan government, the UN this week officially formed the panel, which will advise Sec. General Ban Ki Moon on accountability issues relating to alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law during the final stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

"This is a step in the right direction for Sri Lanka," said TAPI spokesperson Dr. Karunyan Arulanantham. "True reconciliation in Sri Lanka is dependent on accountability for war crimes and human rights violations. Only an independent international investigation will be creditable. We hope that this panel will lead to a full investigation."

TAPI commends the US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice's statement supporting the UN panel. The group urges the US to go further, and take the lead in pressuring the Sri Lankan government to bring war criminals to justice. Alleged crimes include: the intentional bombings of civilians, humanitarian organizations, and hospitals; extrajudicial killing and abuse, internment of unarmed civilians and former combatants; harm to civilians and civilian objects; the killing of captives or combatants seeking to surrender; and individual disappearances.

TAPI is particularly grateful for the UN's decision because the group has little faith in the Sri Lankan government's efforts to form an investigatory commission. As noted by Amnesty International, since 1991 the Sri Lanka government has formed nine other ad-hoc commissions of inquiry to investigate similar human-rights related issues. Unfortunately, these commissions have all lacked credibility and simply resulted in delaying criminal investigations.

TAPI condemns the Sri Lankan Government's vow to bar the UN panel from entering the country. This demonstrates that the Government lacks serious interest in an unbiased investigation, and it further underscores the need for an independent probe.

TAPI believes that the UN's advisory panel should pave the way for a full-blown independent war crimes investigation, and it urges the United States and the international community to continue to push for one.

"The panel is a good first step, but we cannot stop here," said Dr. Arulanantham. "The US must move to the forefront of protecting human rights in Sri Lanka by demanding an independent international examination of human rights abuses. The US can and must play a vital role in ensuring that justice comes to Sri Lanka."

About TAPI

The Tamil American Peace Initiative was formed by a group of Tamil Americans to help

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bring lasting peace, justice, democracy, good governance and economic development to Sri Lanka; to focus attention on the destruction of Tamil communities and culture caused by 30 years of war; and to demand an end to the continuing oppression of Tamils on the island.

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