

Alliance for Peacebuilding
Collaboration Connections
Sri Lanka Crisis
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The humanitarian disaster taking place in Sri Lanka has reached an extremely critical level in recent weeks as the Sri Lankan government seeks to eliminate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in northern Sri Lanka. Approximately 250,000 to 300,000 Tamil civilians are trapped in the Vanni region between LTTE militants and the Sri Lankan army. These civilians have been displaced from their homes and are completely dependent on aid. However, no aid has been able to reach the Vanni region since January 29th.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was forced to remove its expatriate staff from the region after the ICRC hospital in Vanni was repeatedly shelled and finally evacuated. Unofficial sources report hundreds of civilian deaths every day. The Sri Lankan government has released a statement that it will not distinguish between civilians and militants in LTTE controlled areas and the LTTE is not permitting civilians to leave areas under its control. Human Rights Watch has reported that the LTTE continues to use civilians as a human shield while the Sri Lankan Government has failed permit Tamil citizens free movement in safe zones under its control.

There is a profound potential for additional loss of life in Sri Lanka. The international community must act to spare civilian lives in the midst of this tremendous catastrophe.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Senator Patrick Leahy have all called for a cessation of violence for the sake of Tamil civilians. The UN Secretary General has released a statement saying that “immediate, absolute priority must be given to protection of civilians caught in intensified fighting in Vanni region of Sri Lanka.” Amnesty International has called for an immediate ceasefire and the creation of a humanitarian corridor in order to move civilians out of the conflict area and protect human life.

As of the writing of this memo, there has been no discussion of such a ceasefire. The Alliance for Peacebuilding urges the Department of State and all participants in the conflict to act in support of Amnesty International's call for a ceasefire and creation of a humanitarian corridor. Once the humanitarian situation has been addressed, the conflict resolution community is prepared to work with both sides in this conflict to help protect human life and find solutions based on negotiation and mediation rather than violence.

We urge Secretary of State Clinton, the United States Government, and the international community to take immediate action to preserve the lives of civilians in Sri Lanka. It is imperative for the preservation of human rights that the United States and the UN take swift action to ensure that the right to life is protected in northern Sri Lanka.