

HELP

Sri Lanka

Human Rights, Equality, and Lasting Peace

HELP Sri Lanka ♦ PO Box 58087 ♦ Washington, DC 20037-8087 ♦ (703) 899-3806

- I. HELP Sri Lanka, a U.S.-based grassroots advocacy organization committed to promoting and protecting **H**uman Rights, **E**quality and **L**asting **P**eace in Sri Lanka, is gravely concerned about the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan government's inability and unwillingness to address and remedy egregious rights abuses and civilian suffering. The urgency of the crisis has escalated dramatically since the government of Sri Lanka withdrew from its 2002 ceasefire agreement with the LTTE at the start of 2008. With the scrapping of the truce, international ceasefire monitors, the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM), were forced to withdraw from the island, leaving a precarious void at a time of intensified conflict and violence. **We call upon the UN HCR to take immediate action to protect the human rights of innocent civilians and hold the government of Sri Lanka accountable for rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.**

- II. At least 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting in Sri Lanka over the past twenty-five years. Many thousands of these casualties have been innocent civilians. Tamils have by far been the worst affected by violence, harassment, mass arrests and detention, displacement and denial of vital humanitarian assistance.

- III. HELP Sri Lanka is seriously concerned about the following rights abuses and violations, which have been well documented and reported by numerous INGOs and rights groups as well as UN bodies:
 - Overall decline in political and civil rights;
 - Routine use of torture by Sri Lankan security forces;
 - High incidences of abductions and disappearances, primarily of Tamils;
 - Murder, censorship and intimidation of journalists;
 - Ongoing recruitment of child soldiers by both government supported paramilitaries and the LTTE¹;
 - Arbitrary arrests and detentions of Tamil civilians;
 - Forced eviction of Tamils from Colombo.

¹ We welcome the recent announcement by the political head of the LTTE that they have completed the process of demobilizing any child soldiers in their ranks and affirmed their complete compliance. We urge the UN and UNICEF to constructively engage the LTTE and verify the claims in a timely manner.



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- IV. We are especially disturbed by the underreported , inhumane practice by the Sri Lankan military of launching indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks against civilians, including the targeting of schools, hospitals, churches and places of refuge, as cited by UN bodies including the UNHCR and UN SC report on Children and Armed Conflict.
- V. No less critical is the current and growing humanitarian crisis, which predominately affects the Tamil and Tamil-speaking Muslim communities, raising the specter of ethnic cleansing. Over 503,000 persons are internally displaced (IDP), with more than 190,000 newly displaced by upsurge in violence (UNHCR Global Appeal 2008-2009). Dozens of aid workers have been murdered, making Sri Lanka “One of the most dangerous places” for aid workers (John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, 6/07). Restrictions on humanitarian aid and harassment of humanitarian organizations have resulted in lack of access for civilians to lifesaving emergency assistance.
- VI. Madame Arbour and other UN officials have publically acknowledged that the existing mechanisms to monitor and abate human rights abuses have proven woefully inadequate, yet the government adamantly refuses calls by the international community and the UN to allow for the establishment of human rights monitors under UN auspices. The Presidential Commission of Inquiry (COI) set up to investigate grave rights violations including the murder of aid workers has failed to make progress, and the government has ignored the recommendations of the International Group of Eminent Persons to correct the deficiencies of the COI. The constructive criticisms of high ranking UN officials have been rebuked by the Sri Lankan government, which labels even their most distinguished critics terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. Furthermore, the government has demonstrated an unwillingness to engage in meaningful negotiations to reach a political solution to the conflict.
- VII. Until such times as the government of Sri Lanka allows the presence of UN human rights monitors, implements an immediate ceasefire, and commits to work with international facilitators and all concerned parties to the conflict to reach a just, negotiated political solution, HELP Sri Lanka strongly urges the UN Human Rights Council to
- **Immediately revoke Sri Lanka’s voting privileges on the Council;**
 - **Urge member states not to vote for Sri Lanka to continue its membership on the HRC, nor allow Sri Lanka to hold the coveted vice-presidency of the Council;**

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- **Request the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Genocide and the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Armed Conflict undertake action on an urgency basis;**
- **Work to persuade the Sri Lankan government to allow UN field monitors unrestricted access to government and rebel held areas;**
- **Request Special Rapporteurs on Food , Housing and Health undertake urgent missions to the North and East;**
- **Call for a Special Session to address the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka.**