

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We are writing to express our concern about the post-conflict situation in Sri Lanka, and to urge the U.S. government to call an independent international investigation into the alleged war crimes that occurred during Sri Lanka's twenty-five year civil war. We believe that Sri Lanka's past efforts to investigate severe human rights abuses through Commissions of Inquiry – even when supplemented by an international element such as the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) – have not been successful and do not inspire confidence that the current national mechanism would be any more successful, transparent, or credible. As Amnesty International has noted, the Government of Sri Lanka has formed nine other ad-hoc commissions of inquiry since 1991 to investigate disappearances and human rights-related issues. These commissions have lacked the needed credibility, have delayed criminal investigations, and in several instances members of these commissions have resigned in protest at the Government's interference.

As Members of Congress, we fully share the concerns of the international community that Sri Lanka's Reconciliation Commission has much too narrow a scope and no mandate to hold those investigated accountable for their actions. Whatever conclusions this Commission will come to, we strongly believe that only a parallel international mechanism conducting an independent investigation with the formal backing and the authority of the specialized United Nations mechanism, such as the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council, can verify any conclusions of Sri Lanka's Reconciliation Commission. Without such verification, neither accountability nor trust can be achieved, which are crucially important for any successful reconciliation.

As you know, May 19, 2010, marked the one-year anniversary of the end of the war in Sri Lanka. There is mounting evidence that suggests both parties in the conflict committed severe human rights violations during the conflict. The State Department's own October 21, 2009 "Report to Congress on Incidents During the Recent Conflict in Sri Lanka" lists numerous crimes that require further investigation. These alleged crimes include the intentional bombings of civilians and humanitarian organizations; extrajudicial abuse and detention of unarmed civilians and former combatants; the use of child soldiers; harm to civilians and civilian objects; the killing of captives or combatants seeking to surrender; and individual disappearances.

We believe it is in the best interest of the United States and the people of Sri Lanka to ensure a lasting peace in Sri Lanka following a quarter century of ethnic conflict, and that such a peace can only be reached once the full truth about the past is understood.

In light of these concerns, we urge you to call for a robust and independent international investigation that would finally clarify the events that occurred during the conflict and provide the foundation for a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,