

# PEOPLE FOR EQUALITY AND RELIEF IN LANKA

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## **For Immediate Release**

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## **38 Congressional Offices Call Sri Lanka as ‘Red Alert’ for Genocide; Notably Do Not Support U.S. PACOM-Led Evacuation**

Washington, DC March 11, 2009 –38 Members of Congress signed letters to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice, pointing out that Sri Lanka is currently on “Red Alert” for genocide. These letters, sent to the State Department on the morning of March 11<sup>th</sup>, notably do not support a U.S.-led evacuation of refugees, at a time when reports in Indian and Sri Lankan media cite U.S. Pacific Command planning an evacuation of refugees from northern Sri Lanka. Human rights groups have sharply criticized evacuation plans for exacerbating a long-term crisis in Sri Lanka.

The letters, led by Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA), decried the fact that “Tamil noncombatants are deliberately victimized by Sri Lankan government policies.” PEARL was instrumental in working with Congressman Moran’s office to initiate these letters and to secure support from over two dozen offices for the letter. “These letters call attention to the genocidal nature of the attacks against Tamil civilians in northern Sri Lanka. We commend all 38 offices for supporting these letters and for their noble stance championing a besieged population. They have shown genuine courage and determination in speaking out on behalf of silenced Tamils in Sri Lanka, and have thereby acted as a voice for the voiceless. These letters reflect meaningful progress away from the Bush administration’s counter-productive dialogue on terrorism and counter-terrorism, and shift the emphasis back to protecting civilians. We fervently hope that Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice will cease all plans for an evacuation and instead carefully heed the letters’ requests to ensure aid reaches conflict area,” said PEARL representative Arvind Suguness. PEARL held one nation-wide advocacy day on February 20<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with a 7000-person strong rally in front of the White House and over 50 meetings with Congressional offices to garner support for these letters.

The letters used strong language to convey to Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice the need for U.S. involvement on behalf of Tamil civilians under attack in northern Sri Lanka. The letters notably did not support an evacuation of these refugees led by U.S. Pacific Command; South Asian media reported that Secretary Clinton met with Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon on March 10<sup>th</sup> to explore options for a U.S./Indian evacuation. However, the letters emphasized the need for a long-term political resolution “that will guarantee Tamils full political rights and participation in their governance, and an end to the long-standing ethnic discrimination that has fueled the half-century-long violence.”

The diverse, bipartisan group of 38 Members of Congress who co-signed Congressman Moran’s letters included: Burton, Coble, Barney Frank, Barbara Lee, McCaul, McGovern, Schmidt, Watson and Wolf.

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