

PEOPLE FOR EQUALITY AND RELIEF IN LANKA

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For Immediate Release

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Sri Lankan government breaks promise to end use of ‘heavy weapons’ against civilians; rejects UN humanitarian team

On April 27 the Sri Lankan government announced that it would stop its use of “heavy weapons” in its military offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the North of the island. On the same day, the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) and Dr. T. Sathiyamoorthy, Regional Director of Health Services, both inside the “safe zone,” reported that the government was carrying out aerial bombardments and artillery shelling in Mullivaikkal, located in the “Safe Zone.”

In a statement dated April 27, Dr. Sathiyamoorthy wrote that one series of shelling injured 139 civilians and 19 died after being admitted to the hospital. TRO stated that heavy shelling coming from Puthukudiyiruppu, Ianaipalai and Oddusuddan areas and aerial bombardments in the Rattai Vaikal area, killed at least 100 civilians and injured 500. It said the scale of attacks makes it difficult for aid workers to reach injured civilians or assess the number of casualties.

In a visit to Sri Lanka this week John Holmes, UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief, stated he was unable to persuade the Sri Lankan government to allow a “humanitarian pause” in its military offensive. The Sri Lankan government also rejected a UN proposal to send a humanitarian relief team to the war zone, where 60,000 to 100,000 Tamil civilians are at risk.

The UN estimated that 6,500 Tamil civilians have been killed and 14,000 have been injured in the last three months. Despite calls from the United States, United Kingdom and other international human rights organizations to implement an immediate ceasefire and protect civilians, the Sri Lankan government continues its military offensive. The government also rejected a unilateral ceasefire declaration by the LTTE.

PEARL urges the US to take strong leadership in condemning Sri Lanka for continuing to violate international law and attack Tamil civilians in the “Safe Zone”. PEARL urges the US to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions against Sri Lanka to demonstrate its concern for the plight of Tamils. PEARL also urges the UN to bring Sri Lanka to its Security Council agenda and invoke the Responsibility to Protect to allow a UN humanitarian team to enter the war zone and provide international monitoring of refugee camps in the North.

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