

Statement on Sri Lanka

Of the Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide
Mr. Francis Deng

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Both sides in the current fighting in Sri Lanka have been repeatedly urged by the Secretary-General to respect international human rights and humanitarian law obligations, particularly to prevent unlawful killings and accord protection to civilians and detainees. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to excesses of conflict and the Government has a legal obligation to give them special protection. The two sides should be reminded that individuals can be held personally responsible for war crimes and other international crimes committed in the course of conflict and which attract international jurisdiction. The Government should allow the United Nations, and other international humanitarian and aid organizations full and unfettered access to all civilians and detainees in places of detention and processing centers, including all sites for the internally displaced.

It is not too late for the Government and the LTTE to put an end to an increasingly brutal conflict and pursue a reconciliatory and peaceful path with the ethnic Tamil population. This polarizing conflict is identity – related with ethnicity and religion as deeply divisive factors. It will not end with winners and losers and it cannot be ended solely through a military victory that may not be sustainable in the long run unless legitimate grievances are addressed. The LTTE must immediately cease holding human shields and let civilians leave the conflict area. The Government is urged to work with the international community to initiate a political process to create a national framework in which all Sri Lankans can co-exist as equal citizens.