

U.S. Rep. David Price
Statement for the Congressional Record
On the First Anniversary of the End of the Sri Lankan Civil War
May 19, 2010

Madam Speaker:

I rise today to remember the end of Sri Lanka's civil war and call attention to the continued plight of the thousands of Sri Lankans who have been affected by the conflict.

One year ago this week, after more than 25 years of violence, the Sri Lankan military declared victory in its major military offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In so doing, it brought an end to one of the most devastating civil wars of the century, offering the Sri Lankan people hope of a brighter future characterized by peace, reconciliation, and economic prosperity for all citizens.

Unfortunately, this hope has yet to be realized. The Sri Lankan military's final offensive against the LTTE left hundreds of thousands of civilians – most of them Tamils – dislocated, deprived of basic necessities, and without effective legal or political recourse. Since the end of the conflict, the Sri Lankan government has blatantly and repeatedly defied the demands of the international community and commonly accepted norms of justice and human rights by failing to reintegrate large numbers of Tamil citizens, denying access by journalists and humanitarian organizations to conflict-affected areas, and detaining former combatants indefinitely.

It has also become apparent that the Sri Lankan military may have committed serious abuses during the fighting itself, including the indiscriminate shelling of areas designated as civilian safe zones. A growing number of respected human rights organizations – including the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch – have called for an independent international investigation into potential war crimes, yet the Sri Lankan government has yet to open any meaningful inquiry into the allegations.

On this anniversary of the end of the civil war, I call on the government of Sri Lanka to act earnestly and expeditiously to grant safe passage home to the approximately 80,000 Tamil civilians who remain confined to camps, provide ex-combatants with appropriate legal recourse and a path toward reintegration, and end its restrictions on humanitarian and media organizations. It is also past time for the international community to pursue real accountability, including a credible, independent investigation into the potential abuses committed during the 2009 conflict. I urge the Obama Administration to play a leading role in this effort by calling for an investigation at the United Nations and maintaining current restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance to Sri Lanka until the government has demonstrated credible progress toward meeting the international community's demands.

If we do not act soon, this moment of opportunity for lasting peace, justice and reconciliation – which seemed so promising one year ago – may slip away forever.