

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

December 7, 2009

Dear Secretary Clinton,

In advance of a hearing to be held this Thursday, December 10, by the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sri Lanka, I wanted to draw your attention to H. Res 711, which calls for the protection of IDPs and for access to the camps and former conflict zone by international relief groups. H. Res. 711 was passed by the House of Representatives on November 4. Passing 421-1, this legislation should signal the support of the US Congress for the US government to play a more active role in the post-conflict phase in Sri Lanka. A copy of the resolution is attached to this letter.

On October 1, the Department of State's "[Report to Congress on Incidents During the Recent Conflict in Sri Lanka](#)," a compilation of events and incidents that took place in the overwhelmingly Tamil Vanni region in the Northeastern part of Sri Lanka between January and May 2009 during the height of the fighting, was sent to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. The report outlines attacks against known civilian targets and general disregard for civilian well-being by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Additionally, the Government of Sri Lanka's forces killed captives and combatants seeking to surrender. Essential goods and services, including food and medicine, were systematically denied to Tamil regions by the Government of Sri Lanka. Large-scale, arbitrary, and extra-judicial arrests, as well as torture, killings, and disappearances of Tamils by Sri Lankan authorities have also been documented. While the report did outline concerns about the behavior of both the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), it concluded that the majority of alleged crimes were committed by the forces of the Government of Sri Lanka and their agents.

Given the findings of the report, it seems imperative that the Government of Sri Lanka not have sole control and oversight over the "post-conflict" phase. The Government of Sri Lanka, while finally allowing Tamils to leave the IDP detention camps, continues to prevent international organizations, media, or NGOs access to the former conflict area. Many questions remain about resettlement, the return of land/property to Tamil civilians, and a path forward for political reconciliation—which grows increasingly difficult given the short timeline before the next Sri Lankan election. Should this situation be allowed to continue, continued repression of the Tamil civilian population and a return to conflict seem inevitable.

To address this serious and growing concern, two policy initiatives that engage the international community to find a permanent solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka should be considered. First,

it is imperative that the US government call for an independent commission to investigate the alleged war crimes that took place on both sides during the conflict so the perpetrators can be held accountable. Second, the Department of State should support the creation of a United Nations Commission that would establish a “solutions framework” that would include the participation of all key constituencies in Sri Lanka and delineate a “roadmap” for political, security, and development solutions. I strongly believe that these two steps are necessary first steps to close the past and provide a doorway to the future, as well as address the underlying causes of the conflict, maintain the peace, and help provide a voice for the underrepresented populations in Sri Lanka that can offset future unrest.

Additionally, as mentioned above, in order to address the most immediate potential threats to peace in Sri Lanka, the US government should urge the Government of Sri Lanka to allow international observers to verify the conditions in the former conflict zone and remaining government-run camps. The treatment of suspected combatants being detained by Sri Lankan forces should also be monitored.

Thank you for your consideration and I appreciate your attention to this matter. Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact [name and title] on my staff at [phone number and email].

Sincerely,

Danny Davis
Member of Congress