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UN chief 'appalled' by weekend death toll in Sri Lankan conflict



Displaced Sri Lankan civilians at a special site near the town of Vavuniya

11 May 2009 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today said he was appalled at the killing of hundreds of Sri Lankan civilians caught in the middle of hostilities between the army and separatist Tamil rebels over the weekend.

The raging conflict in the north of the South Asian nation between Government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has claimed thousands of lives in the past several months, Mr. Ban said in a **statement** attributable to his spokesperson.

Voicing deep concern over the continued use of heavy weapons in the conflict zone, a shrinking pocket of land on the northern coastline, he stressed that the "reckless disrespect shown by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the safety of civilians has led to thousands of people remaining trapped in the area."

Mr. Ban pressed both sides, in the strongest terms possible, to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law, reminding them that the world is watching events in Sri Lanka closely.

He said that the LTTE must allow the remaining civilians in the conflict zone – estimated by the UN to be over 50,000 – to leave immediately, and urged the Government to bring the conflict to an end "without further bloodshed."

The Secretary-General stressed that the terms for halting the military offensive must be made public and the LTTE must "give sober and positive consideration of those terms."

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**) said today that 900 civilians reportedly escaped from the conflict zone in Mullaitivu and most have reached Omanthai. So far, over 196,000 people have crossed to the Government-controlled areas from the conflict zone.

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