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THE DEEPENING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

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PROCEEDINGS

MS. FERRIS: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Beth Ferris. I'm a Senior Fellow here at Brookings and co-director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement.

I'd like to welcome you this afternoon's session on the deepening humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. This is a crisis that indeed has deepened even since the announcement of the event was posted with news this morning of a fresh government offensive with thousands of civilians leaving the so-called safe zone; certainly the humanitarian tragedy that continues to unfold in that part of the country.

But it's also important to remember that this conflict has gone on since 1983. There has been a protracted conflict that's displaced hundreds of thousands of people in differing layers of displacement with different complexities when it comes to resolving the situation. It's also a very dangerous place for humanitarian workers. According to the internal displacement monitoring center, over 78 workers have disappeared or been killed since 2006.

We have a panel today with four individuals who will be sharing their impressions and insights from working on the issue of Sri Lanka from different capacities, and we welcome all of them. We've asked them each to speak for 10 or 15 minutes, and then we'll have time for our questions and discussion at the end.

We will begin with Amin Awad, here on my immediate left, who is a representative of UNHCR in Sri Lanka. You have their biographical information with you, so I won't go through it all except to note that he has worked with UNHCR for 20 years, has been in Sri Lanka for three and a half years, and has also served in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, Tajikistan, Macedonia, Northern Iraq, and other crises around the world.

He will then be followed by Mike Owen, who is acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs. Prior to this, he was Director of the State Department's Office for India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Bhutan. And before that he served in Mumbai, also in Tanzania, Ghana, Colombo, Karachi, and other places.

Our third speaker will be Muttakrishna Sarvanathan, who is a development economist and principal researcher at the Point Pedro Institute of Development in Northern Sri Lanka. He's currently a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. He's done a lot of skill research in Sri Lanka and has written several books both on the economy and on the crisis situation.

Finally, we will hear from Anna Neistat, who is a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch and a specialist in humanitarian crises. She, too, has worked on in a variety of situations including Chechnya, Haiti, Zimbabwe, Nepal, and Israel. So lots of different kinds of backgrounds for our panelists, and we are delighted to have you here, and I give the floor now to Amin Awad.

Thank you very much.

MR. AWAD: Thank you very much, and I'm happy to be here.

Good afternoon. My name is Amin Awad, and I have been as the UNHCR representative in Sri Lanka since November 2005. The conflict started in 2006, and since then, as you know, following the Peace Agreement, events evolved and we had the conflict continuing during the last three and a half years, and this is the last stages of where we are now.

As far as UNHCR goes in Sri Lanka, I'll also give you a brief introductory remark we have about our presence and work there. We have about 150 to 160 staff members. One-third of that, about 50, are international staff. We have presence in eight locations in the North and the East. We have presence in Jaffna, in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Vavuniya, and we had until recently a presence in Kilinochchi, and we still maintain a presence in Minnar and in Puttalam, and of course as well as in Colombo.

The UNHCR established presence in Sri Lanka back in the '80s. They (inaudible) to deal with their (inaudible) from India. Until then our mandated involved, at the request of the government particularly, to particularly not get involved with the IDD. We have been at it since that time.

The current situation, as it stands, as the war evolved from the first spark in Trincomalee, then it went to Jaffna, back to Trincomalee, down to Batticaloa, then to Minnar, then to (inaudible) to Mullaitivu, and now this

is where the front line is, and that stable plan in the Eastern part of Mullaitivu.

We have about anywhere from 75,000 to 180,000 or more, depending on the sources. The U.N. did not have presence in the (inaudible) in September. According to the government there are 75,000 people; according to the U.N. and ICFT anywhere between 150-to-180 thousand. According to some NGOs and local groups in the (inaudible), the number could be as high as 8,000.

Our advocacy effort at this point concentrates actually more on the people who are trapped in the valley, given the conflict that's going on and exploiting of the population through the population, the civilian population in the conflict on, and all measures to protect them apply in this conflict in particular.

The U.N. actually are, along with other partners, and many of them international actually have been advocating hard with both sides to make sure that the civilians should be spared the ramification of the conflict with an opportunity for the LDD to release the people, at least to allow them to move to areas where they feel safe. We've been asking the government also to not use force when there's no need and make sure that to handle the situation with extreme caution, given the fact that now the population is very much mixed with combatants, and that it's a very small area, and people are condensed in a small part of that Mullaitivu strip, and casualties are inevitable.

So far we have about 70,000 people who left the valley into Vavuniya. In the North Jaffna and Minnar. We are facing some challenges as far as receiving these people, partly with the space overcrowding in the 20 private centers and camps that are available. People are coming at a higher rate now, especially during the last few weeks, and they make up to 2,000 a day, and we would like to see a concerted effort to make sure that overcrowded conditions in the private centers, especially the schools around Vavuniya, are relieved so that people are moving to better camps.

We also have been advocating with the government to provide more land so that we, UNHCR and other agencies, can help the government with the construction of camps that are meeting the minimum standards.

There are challenges, and we're hoping the government to get rid of challenges as far as the protection of IDPs are concerned in the camps. There are constraints. We understand its a political concern with the government, but we are also asking the government to balance these political concerns with issues like civil liberties, freedom of movement, IDPS, from these camps, the civilian characteristic of the camps -- in other words, removing the military from inside the camps and replacing them with the police, with the civil administration, and giving the military at the periphery of the camp for security reasons, obviously.

We are also asking for the right of IDPs to have visitation from outside by relatives and friends. We are asking for unification of families

who are separated because they exited the families to a different group. And we're also asking for special people in need -- elderly, pregnant women, handicapped and so on and so forth -- be also allowed to leave at once.

That doesn't mean these measures should be in lieu of a freedoms movement. We still continue to advocate for a freedoms movement, and we keep asking the government to grant freedom of movement to almost everybody in the camps, and they should undertake a screening measure in a very easy manner, instruction manner, and (inaudible) manner, and if there's a need to separate the combatants from the rest of the city population in the camp, that should also be done as soon as possible.

And I think that is the concern of the international community and these are the cases that are -- that existed in (inaudible); however, there were achievements that are done. We acknowledge them. We continue to work with the government to increase the number of people who are leaving the camps: the elderly over 60, pregnant woman, handicapped, people with special needs in general. So far 1,600 people were released. We managed to have site visits, relative and friends visits to -- visitation rights to the camp. It happens in the case of Jaffna, sometimes in Vavuniya. We're asking for more family communications that have been extended for the refugees in the last couple of weeks, and we're asking for the government to share with us the registration records so that we can increase and accelerate the unification, some of the unification process.

UNHCR, aside from the protection monitoring and advocating for those issues, we're also working on the shelter side of things where us and 16 other shelter partners are working upon a construction of a camp with the capacity to accept 7,000 people. That is called many farms jointly, and these are emergency temporary shelters and not just a (inaudible) permanent shelter that is the government's.

We're also working again in -- we're starting to work along the same lines, and there again the shelter in a second zone with a collectivity of another 20,000 people. I must say, the complexity of the government analysis at this point is under enormous pressure because the number of people who are coming because of the adverse conditions, the physical conditions in these areas, where the government submitted as camps.

We also deliver nonfood items, and these are basically the usual kitchen sets, clothing, plastic mats, (inaudible), hygiene kits, clothing to IDPs, and there have been massive distributions during the last few weeks, and our people are coming back from the valley.

We still have (inaudible), and as I keep saying, as we (inaudible) people, and we see them, and we advocate to the government for their rights and their protection, I think the challenge more than those for those in the camp is the problem the civilian population is facing inside the banks .

The weather conditions are bad: rains, winds, wet ground, limited supplies of food, medicine, and above all of this, of course, is the

security situation, as, if I can get me in there (inaudible) the government continues, the civilians are squeezed between two groups that are basically fighting. And our call again to the (inaudible) and to the government to use extreme cautions.

Perhaps somebody else will talk here, and if there are any questions from the floor.

MS. FERRIS: Uh-huh. I think we'll go ahead, then, and have the other presentations and then open it up. So we turn now to Mike Owen in the Department of State.

MR. OWEN: Thank you, and thanks for the invitation to be here today. I really appreciate that.

I thought I would start with just a little summary of some of the things that have happened in the last 24 hours, and others may have other updates on that, and then talk a bit about the steps that we are taking in the U.S. government to try to bring the conflict to a peaceful conclusion, but also spend some time thinking about and talking about the long run, because we think that it's really critically important to look at the long run and how we can bring a more lasting sort of peace to Sri Lanka.

Some of you may have heard very early today, Monday morning, some 35,000 civilians who were trapped in the safe zone managed to get out of the safe zone. They fled on foot to the west. Our reports -- I spoke to our ambassador a couple of times this morning -- our best reports are that there was a breach in the berms that the LTT had built.

The civilians were able to run out through that breach and reach safety.

There was some firing across the boundary of the safe zone between the military and the LTT but our best information is that the military did not actually enter into the safe zone; they were firing into the safe zone from outside, and the 35,000 civilians managed to flee. They are being processed by the Sri Lankan military, and our understanding is they're going to be put on buses and sent to these camps in Vavuniya, which we just heard about. That's going to put, obviously, an enormous strain on the resources in Vavuniya, 35,000 additional entrants, and, of course, there are many more probably on the way over the next couple of weeks.

Separately, we also heard that a number of civilians also managed to flee by boat. Ninety-two boats left the safe zone from the beach this morning. About 1500 passenger would on those boats, and they have now been picked up by the Sri Lankan navy. They are also being processed and sent to Vavuniya as well. So you have over 36,000 people soon arriving in Vavuniya.

As we heard, the UNHCR is on the ground there to receive these civilians, and I understand that food is there, some shelter is there. There could be an issue with portable water and with sanitation, and I know the UNHCR is working very hard to try to get the best sort of circumstances they can. So this is the most recent update that we've heard on what happened today.

I think this is really especially significant, of course, because

we've been hearing from the LTT on many occasions when we stress the importance of allowing civilians to leave the safe zone. The LTT has often responded by saying the civilians don't want to leave; they want to stay because they're afraid of what might happen to them once they leave. I think this clearly shows that that is not the case. Thirty-five thousand civilians voted with their feet and did obviously want to risk a lot in order to leave.

Just a few comments on what we're trying to do to help bring this to an end. I'm sure, if you've been following Sri Lanka, you've seen that we've issued many statements over the last several months. The most recent one was issued by the State Department's spokesperson, Robert Woods, on the last Thursday, calling for both parties to implement an immediate humanitarian pause in the fighting to allow the international community to find a way to get the civilians out of the safe zone and to safety.

Unfortunately, this was not heeded. The fighting has continued since a brief pause that was earlier last week, but we are continuing to call for a pause that will allow some sort of mechanism to get those remaining civilians out of harm's way.

There are a lot of numbers that you'll hear on the number of civilians. It's very difficult to know with precision how many are there. Our best estimate is based on imagery, aerial imagery, is there's around 26-to-27 thousand tents there in that area, and so if you make an

assumption of maybe five people per tent, that would give you around 135-140 thousand civilians. But that's obviously an estimate, we don't know. It could be more, it could be fewer, but it's definitely fewer after the events of today.

In terms of what else we're doing, there was a co-chairs, a conference call on Saturday morning. The Tokyo co-chairs comprised Japan, European Union, Norway and United States. This was a mechanism that was set up several years ago, first to look at sort of rebuilding/reconstruction of Sri Lanka in a post-conflict scenario, but is now a forced focus on trying to bring the conflict to an end. You'll see probably a statement from the co-chairs tomorrow on the contents of that call, and we expect another call with follow-ups on Wednesday of this week.

Again, what we're continuing to push for is a humanitarian pause, and we can find a way, diplomatically, to get these people who are trapped, civilians who are trapped in the zone, to safety. We've had repeated engagement with the government of Sri Lanka through our ambassador in Colombo, Bob Blake, who's been doing a great job, and, of course, with many people here in Washington as well, and at the U.N., and with like-minded colleagues. So we're continuing to push through everything that we can on the diplomatic front.

The next steps, as I say, are to press for a pause in the fighting and to evacuate civilians. We also want to emphasize the importance of having international standards in these camps where the

civilians are fleeing to. There's going to be a tremendous strain on these camps, and it's really imperative that we do, the international community do everything possible to make sure that all of those camps meet fully international standard, that the international community, the UNHCR, other U.N. agencies, the ICRC be directly involved in that, in monitoring the process and in helping to get those people resettled as quickly as possible.

Also, we're trying quietly -- and I can't talk too much about this -- but we are trying quietly behind the scene to find a way to bring an end to the fighting. It's very difficult to see exactly how that's going to happen, but we think there are a couple of elements that need to be involved, and we need to find a way for the LTT to surrender arms possibly to a third party in the context of a pause in the fighting, to surrender their arms in exchange for some sort of limited amnesty to at least some members of the LTT and the beginning of a political process.

Now, those are pretty vague -- that's a pretty vague outline, and we realize that. It's going to require a lot of negotiation with the parties involved to bring that to fruition in a really a coherent way, but that is something that is underway behind the scenes to try to find a way to reach that point.

So that's sort of where we are on our current diplomatic effort, but as I said, I think it's really important to look longer-term. We, of course, have designated the LTT as a terrorist organization, and we certainly have no sympathy for some of the things that they've carried out, but I think you

do have to ask a very legitimate question: Why did they have a following in the beginning? And I think it's because some in the Tamil community do have legitimate grievances, and we need to find -- I think it's imperative for Sri Lankans to find a way to give everyone in the community, all Sri Lankans a legitimate voice in their government. And so we want to support the government of Sri Lanka as they move forward in an effort to do exactly that.

I think it's important that Sri Lanka move toward really a democratic -- a strong democratic governance in a multiethnic society in which all groups have a voice in that society. So the devolution of power to the provinces, as envisioned in the 13th Amendment, that's something that we feel is very important as the first step, but it needs to go beyond that. There are going to be a lot of civil society challenges in the next several years in dealing with the aftermath of this conflict and making sure that the conflict doesn't reignite as a result of mistakes that are made now. So we want to work closely with the government in that way.

And I would emphasize that we believe the diaspora, the Sri Lankan diaspora, and particularly the Tamil diaspora in North America, in Europe, elsewhere, have a very important role to play in this, you know. They should, I hope, be speaking out in terms of what they envisioned for Sri Lanka in a post-conflict scenario. They have an important voice in that process.

Now, just to go through some of the specific steps that we

envision over the next, probably next couple of years, I've sort of spoken about the short-term measures -- humanitarian pause, getting civilians out of the way, helping to find some way, some mechanism for the conflict to end through a surrendering of arms and some sort of amnesty. But once the conflict ends, there are several other things we envision doing as quickly as possible.

One is demining. That is going to be critically important as the LTT has dropped back over the last several of months to a couple of years. They have left mines in many, many locations throughout Northern Sri Lanka. I don't think anyone knows exactly where those mines are, so there's not a map there to find where we have to go and demine. So that's going to be a tremendous undertaking.

We're already talking with some of our counterparts in other countries and other NGOs, NGO community, to try to put together a coherent effort in which we can get a lot of resources on the ground in a hurry to help the government of Sri Lanka demine the northern part of the country. We have already identified \$10 million we're prepared to put to this right away, and we hope to have additional resources, subsequently.

I think it's very important to do that right away so that there is no excuse for people staying in camps any longer than they have to. People can get back to their villages and their towns wherever they were, and that's very important. We want to work with the international community and the government of Sri Lanka to resettle refugees as quickly as possible.

I mentioned civil society challenges. I think you're going to see a lot during that resettlement effort because, inevitably, if you're resettling, say, 150,000 people, some people are going to go back to their home and find that somebody else is living in their house. Some people are going to go back and find that somebody's farming their land, so finding a way to resolve those disputes, quickly and judiciously, I think will be a very big challenge and one that we want to support the government in their effort to do that.

We also want to work, as I said, with the international community. We find it very important that the international community play an absolutely central role in this resettlement. The government of Sri Lanka has committed to resettling 80 percent of the refugees by year's end. We'd like to help them reset that goal. We think that's a very laudable goal if they can reach that, and we'll certainly try to support them.

I would also urge the government of Sri Lanka to grant visas to people who are coming to Sri Lanka to try and help -- members of the ICRC, other international organizations-- make sure they can get there and provide the help, because to deal with this number of displaced persons, it's going to require a concerted international effort.

Another thing that has to happen pretty quickly as people are being resettled is voter registration and national ID cards, making sure that everyone has an identify and that everyone who is eligible to vote is registered to vote. That's going to be critically important. Some people

have been displaced for quite some length of time. Making sure they're resettled and registered to vote is going be critical to future democracy.

We want to work with everyone to make sure that we have a program of voter education, election logistics and monitoring of elections, because elections will come. They'll have to come sooner rather than later, we hope, and we want to make sure that the elections are free and fair, and that all Sri Lankans have a credible voice in choosing who their future leadership will be.

We hope to see the rise of maybe some new voices in the Tamil community, moderate voices in the North. We think that's very, very important, and we want to work with the Tamil community, and I think here especially the diaspora has a very important role to play in helping build a sort of new set of moderate Tamil voices in the North. Building-rebuilding infrastructure and civil society, that's something that's going to be very important. We are doing that to a limited degree in the East now, and we hope to be able to do the same thing on a larger scale in the North in the future.

And then we're going to need to continue to press on a number of important issues, rights issues. I would say one of the most important is trust freedom. There have been a lot of attacks on media in Sri Lanka. We need to make sure that journalists are protected and that the media is able to report effectively what's going on throughout the country. We think that's very important.

And, as I said earlier, we're going to press for and hope that the government will agree to implement the 13th Amendment as envisioned as quickly as possible.

I'd just like to say in closing a couple of things. I've talked a lot about the Sinhalese community, Tamil community. I think we need to realize that Sri Lanka is a much more complex place than that. We've had some meetings with the Tamil diaspora in North America, and even there they have great differences of opinion, different viewpoints. Certainly within a society like Sri Lanka there are many people with many different viewpoints and voices. I think the key is that everyone has a voice, everyone has a legitimate voice and can be heard.

There is also a large Muslim community, of course, in Sri Lanka. They need to be heard as well, but I think we need to be careful about not reducing everything to Tamil versus Sinhalese but recognize the sort of multicultural role of character of Sri Lankan society.

And just in closing, I'd like to pay a compliment to the international community, the international organizations like the UNHCR, NGOs like Human Rights Watch and others who have done, I think, a great job in a very difficult situation. We will continue to support these organizations. We are one of the largest donors for, certainly, for food relief to the displaced persons, and we'll continue to provide that support in the future.

I think I'll stop there and be glad to answer any questions.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you very much, Mike. You're certain raising a lot of issues ranging from the present situation and have gone into the longer term on reconstruction.

We turn now to Muttukrishna, please.

MR. SARVANATHAN: Okay, thank you very much. I just basically, a bit of compliment what my previous speaker said from some three-level information myself had gathered in the past few months, because I have been physically here since last October, so I do not have a first-hand knowledge.

But we do have South Vavuniya, Jaffna in the North, and particularly in Ampara in the east, so I'll play focus on the North. There are people -- the people who are fleeing the no-fly zone of from the running (inaudible), and the police come to Vavuniya, but there are also people going to Jaffa peninsula, although a lesser number of people, and relatively, you can actually, able to access them much more freely than we could, ourselves could do in Vavuniya.

So our staff have been speaking to, talking to a lot of the people who are in camps in Lyitticopai, in Kilinochchi and Marigamamiliias of the peninsula, and also, we also know information from the (inaudible) like telephone calls made from the people still hold up in the no-fly zone to the Kipanchino French in the peninsula as the less in other parts of the country, including Kalum with other places, so that is some kind of information we are having.

The cities' economy in the money or even in the narrow strip of area has not completely collapsed. They seem to be still believing that they could re-emerge of the VHS -- that's what their abilities whether we believe it or not. And they are making a good business out of some of this misery as well. Apparently, they are charging three sovereigns of gold to be Bilabanka for a family, for example, and each sovereign is eight grams, so three sovereigns is 24 grams of gold, because it's high cost. If you don't have that much liquid cash, so they take some jewelry, maybe women's jewelry intended for building bunkers for the people who are hold up there.

For example, satellite telephone calls, they are charging apiece 1,000 per minute to call anywhere in the world because that's a fresh charge, and if a fish, for example, is selling at (inaudible) 3,000 aniculograms then I inquired how could people at this stage afford this?

There is still money flows from abroad. For example, people that keep Ankino friends of those some is living in the same country give money to some (inaudible) front organizations in these countries, and then to satellite phones, they pass the message to the other end and (inaudible).

So that kind of what we call on daily determinant or Havalauholine South Asia. In English it's money laundering. So that kind of an economy is still ongoing. So I also question some of myself, what are they trying to achieve by amassing all this money at this late stage because their life is (inaudible) any second.

There are two really possible reasons: One is that they're still

at the top level. There's hardly a middle level now. There is a more or less top level leadership and also very all recruits, recently recruited people who put into their front line to safeguard the border areas and not allow the people to free (inaudible).

So you kill the hope among the top leaders that they would come up off of these streets and defeat some way or the other the attitude their own fight back or through some international intervention. So there is some hope.

And on the other hand, also it could be also a reason that the al-Qaeda -- the leaderships hold on the al-Qaeda to sell fact very much win, so there is not much of a tight control as they usually had for a very long time. So therefore maybe some of the lower-rung leaders are making this money, and sending this money out of the area to people who are fleeing the area to go into a controlled area. So those could be two possible explanations.

We also hear that the treatment of people who are fleeing the areas to the government-controlled areas, whether to the (inaudible) or to Vavuniya, that there is a considerable amount of sexual harassment of women by the Sri Lankan armed forces. (inaudible) I hear that the police are behaving better than the army personnel, and whenever women soldiers are trying to check women civilians, sometimes they are forcibly sidelined by men soldiers and they want to check themselves, for whatever reason.

So although because of the social stigmas, they are not speaking out publicly, but this is some of this information that is told to some of their close relations. Of course, we don't have too much of detail yet.

And also to my understanding, the government does not acknowledge it, but to whatever information we have just still not only in the no-fly zone. Apparently, there are small areas of, particularly, forested jungle, areas there are still ITT forces there along with a considerable amount of civilians as human shields.

There are two evidences we have gathered so far for that, is, I think, too, reasonable, but Ms. Armenaur could probably (inaudible) this factor that they did attack a convoy of food items taken by through the A-9 to the peninsula.

So they could not -- they shell, basically, so they could not have shelled from the northeastern coast of the no-fly zone, so it could have closer to the A-9, so our hunch is that it's somewhere around (inaudible) between the A-9 and this front area there are. I know possibly that a long time ago there are very much, particularly (inaudible). They are maybe, and also there is another evidence for that is that some of the people who have called their families through satellite phones just now had -- of course, they couldn't tell professionally the ideas. Of course, all these (inaudible) by these people because they are the ones who are having the satellite phones and letting people use for 1,000 rupees a minute, 1,000 rupees is just about eight to nine dollars a teleaction rate for a minute.

So, but they have said that, okay, for example, two weeks ago we heard that some people calling their family and saying that, oh, they have a lot of (inaudible) phone just now, so there were about 300 people waiting in the queue to call their kith and kin, not only in Sri Lanka, but also abroad. These are some of the evidence we had that it is not only there are certain areas still army has -- the armed forces have not been able to still go there are passages, and they don't have the physical human power to really go into those areas yet other than the no-fly zone.

So this is some of this factual information that is what we get from the ground.

Okay, as far as this, the level of the city , I have a feeling like the past six months I've been following the (inaudible), activities of the (inaudible) committees in Europe, North America as the Latin -- India, for India militias. They have much more civilian support among the diaspora community than within the country, so there are a whole lot of reasons for that. I don't have time to go into that, but that is a fact.

So I'm fortunate enough, I guess, any kind of a humanitarian -- what way you call it, humanitarian powers, or the chief (inaudible) or whatever to release these civilians out of the -- off the accesses of the LTTE, but then that does not provide a lifeline to LTTE. LTT has through all these conflicts survived, fortunately from their point of view, unfortunately from the point of view of the Tamil community -- that a similar kind of dire situation.

The first one was in 1987 when the Sri Lankan army itself tried

to wrest control of the whatever (inaudible) area of the (inaudible) from the LTT than India (inaudible), and I don't want to go into the whole issue of that.

The second time the Indian peacekeeping force, which was stationed between '87 and late '89, which really eliminated the entity. This was contested by the literal identity itself. Their numbers shrank to 50, but fortunately for them, unfortunately for Sri Lanka, then the president gave a lifeline to them and asked the Indian peacekeeping force to leave the country. So that was the second chance they had to escape from almost virtual elimination.

So this is, I think, after 20 years, the second week of (inaudible) chances late '89 to recommend (inaudible) understanding, and I don't think common people, at least who are in Sri Lanka, whether in an office of Sri Lanka or other parts of Sri Lanka, would like a city to prolong for the five, ten, or even 20 years, because that will be disastrous for the Tamil colony (inaudible) that eliminated all the modernization, particularly leadership, intellectual particularly, or they have forced them out into exile.

Okay, that is hyperactivity, as Mr. Michael Owen said, among the conventional community to somehow resolve this issue. But from the cities' point of view, it's a life and death (inaudible). And like in the East, a similar situation arose in a Wahari when there was corner did Wahari . They were holding onto the population, but eventually, they let them go because they could always run to money , but this is the kind of a life and death (inaudible).

But I also have to say that a significant number of them have all been dispersed throughout the world in the past two years. During the -- it started in the C-5 times the close (inaudible) of the city hierarchy had moved to the western countries after the treaties or whatever, and even in the past two years the middle-level and lower-level al-Qaeda's) and moved, including to India (inaudible). I know the names of some of them, so that spread out in Europe, North America, India, Singapore, Malaysia, and so they still have armed people, well-trained armed people, above so they could still -- this isn't the hope they have, even if the top relationship is eliminated physically in the coming months, that somehow they come back sometime in the future from some foreign land.

And there also talks of they have gone into places like Yemen , you know, back of (inaudible) myself for control of the government of Yemen so -- and also the Thai border. So this had to be taken into account, so it is not a sort of an international conflict. I mean it has been always quite well internationalized but not so in the past few months because of very hyperactivity of the diaspora community.

So I don't want to go into much more detail, but I am also aware that the special representative of the U.N. Secretary General, Mr. Jana Marius in Colombo for the last few years, and also he is set to be a foreign possibility of meeting the -- some of the leadership of the LTT, personally, in the no-fly zones. But I have to, from my personal understanding of the leadership of the LTT and the knowledge from my

childhood, it would be very dangerous for any foreigner, let alone special representative of the U.N., to particularly go in there. Any other lines of communication is fine, but because they could become a hostage, and it would be a real -- create international a real international crisis if that happens, because that could be the best human shield they could get for their leader.

There are two or three people at the top who are looking for such high profile targets to take hostage, because ordinary civilians are nothing for them, you know, but if a foreigner, especially a special representative of the U.N. or any other organization for a top -- as a hostage, then there's no way out.

Now, I just throw some things on the political focus, what are written in the study from the State Department said. I mean this is where the government is weak, I think. I think the majority or silent -- whatever you call it -- the silent majority of the Tamil people, including in the diaspora -- let me say that -- beside their hyperactivism of some of the diaspora in the past few months, the silent majority is for reasonable conform to democratic norms and wants a democracy back in the northern and eastern part of Sri Lanka.

So therefore, there needs to be attempt to tap on this kind of population, whatever a city prefers to do with it, whether it wants to join the democratic may seem not, it doesn't matter. To me, as long as a leader, at least two or three leaders are alive, it's very difficult for them to enter a

political mainstream. The leader himself is (inaudible) for president (phonetic.) The intelligence chief is German and the chief Tiger leader is two-faced (phonetic.)

There are some conflicting information about whether two sides, the two Tiger leader is still alive or not, but I'm not sure 100 percent. But at least for two, Amin Prabhakaran and the son is still in that area. People have seen them. So until they're physically alive, it's very -- I don't think they will give up. I did listen to a radio interview, to an Australian radio interview given by one Yogi van Yogievich who used to be a spokesperson for the former (inaudible) Portugal ring leader, Martel, who was assassinated. So he didn't think it was interminable. It was a federal one, our interior minister's speech I did listen to. That's two days ago.

There are still inconsistencies in a sense, so they are still hoping that things will turn around and they would come out of this which will extension .

So, yes. On the Sri Lankan side, yes. In simple, I do not think that -- of course, with the government's attitude is that the so-called model is this -- they want to revive democracy in another province in the model of the eastern province . But I hardly think any kind of positive things, not any I would say, but people are not still satisfied that there is a real democracy in the eastern province. There are a lot of internal conflicts within the ruling party in the eastern province itself. Pilyan with Iscubina is a major factor, and chiefly so of the eastern policy is complaining constantly about lack of

resources to undertake a meaningful activity as a (inaudible).

And also among the, even from the eastern general public, there is not much of sympathy, or the further fact that they have won the elections, however also that may be. I really don't want to go into detail -- but I don't think they have that much of a sort of a durable legitimacy as a democratic representative of the eastern people. So if that kind of a model is going to be replicated in the North, I don't think.

And also we have to remember that North is much different from the East in a sense it is a multiethnic community. There's a strong Muslim community there, so there is always some kind of flexibility, room for the government to manipulate or negotiate. But in the North is it kind of a monoethnic conflict now. Before there was a significant amount of Muslim population who were driven out by the LTT in 1990. So I think giving power to sort of former armed groups is not the best way. I mean if they are properly in a freer-style election, if they are really elected by the people, we have no objection.

But I don't think that was the case in the East, and I don't think that will be the case in the North, at least in the existing situation. So I think -- and also there is to win over the hearts and minds of the Tamil minority, not only within Sri Lanka but also in the diaspora still, and I should think -- the Sri Lankan government should think beyond this narrow vision of a unitary state.

Of course, nobody could have sort of a strong feeling for a

unitary state of a federal, a quasi-federal kind of state, but that is open for negotiation. That should be open for even -- the govern should not hesitate to go for a referendum to other people of the northern-east or even to other countries. I mean I wouldn't say that the definition should be restricted to the northern-east, but to other countries, what kind of Fed they would like to see in Sri Lanka in five or ten years down the road, whether they still want to maintain the unitary status of the -- or federal state.

I mean "federal" does not mean that their particular model of federalism -- there are various forms of federalism -- it could be even within the current 13th Amendment whereby the political concept was set up and the function of government.

The Sri Lanka, of course, paper would say that Sri Lanka has rectified, the government has rectified a lot of the injustices done to the minority (inaudible) issues: independence, for example, language rights, the Sinhala may be official language in '56, but in the mid-'80s Tamil has also been made official language. In paper, yes, it looks fine, but implementation is very vague. Even I still get letters in languages which I can't read, although I can read a little bit of -- I can talk a little of Sinhala, but I can't -- so implementation is very weak.

So I think, in the same way, I think a lot of the western countries including the U.S. which has outgrown LTTE, but still they are carrying on with the activities, I know in the suburbs of the D.C., at the last it's in D.C., in terms of collection of money, mobilization of even arms

-- I don't want to go into detail -- I think that's still going on. In Canada also, and India came also then, and the U.S.

So in the same way that the implementation, enforcement of the -- of (inaudible) in these countries are weak, a similar kind of situation exists in Sri Lanka where some of the past long-lasting, the legitimate grievances or injustices are being rectified, but the implementation has been weak thus far. So I think government and the donor committee should contemplate on that kind of implementation.

Also from the Tamil political side, they had to really, really look, take a deep introspection of their whole politics in the post-1977 period. I mean politics has a long democratic tradition. The only time when they were thrown out of parliament in '82, I think, and Amin Munkar the then government of lord separation, '80 party political separation of the Tamil democratic mainstream party to a less -- less -- was virtually thrown out of the parliament because they did not want to take an oath thing that they would not kind of look for a big state .

So since then the Indian government, or the Norwegian government, or the co-chairs, everybody had been banking on one liberal group or the other, and so the -- for ex-militant group or ex-armed group was the LTTE. I think that has to change from as an ethnic term . I think we have to go back to our old political machine, democratic political parties. We didn't have any violence; we did not use arms for addressing our grievances or anything like that.

Yeah, so I'll stop there, basically, yeah. So I'm not too comfortable -- I mean I'll tell you myself, I think I also have a lot of connection with Tamil (inaudible) group in the U.K. and Europe, because I lived in the U.K. for about 10 years between the late '80s and late '90s, so I know that that's a group look much more than the North Tamil industrial group, and also from the field in the past 10 years I've been on television in Sri Lanka, so then officially I had access to people not only in government-controlled areas but also in the LTT controlled areas.

So they would like real democracy, even within their (inaudible) for example, although the cities more or less wiped out under the armed group which is aligned with the government. Of course, they may deny that they are an armed group; they are mixed in political parties, they have a member, that is a minister who is in the cabinet. But still they like to say they are taxing people's businesses -- of course, I'm not people -- but they are taxing businesses at the same way as the NDT has been doing,

So because of these kind of things, I feel that (inaudible) don't have much confidence in the so-called ex-(inaudible) as well. Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you very much, Muttakrishna.

We turn now to Anna Neistat. Please, Anna?

MS. NEISTAT: I'll try to be brief because I do want to leave some time for your questions, and I will actually go back to what is happening right now, because I think at this point this is something we all should be mostly concerned about. And as much as Human Rights Watch

has been involved in working in Sri Lanka for many years -- and I hope we'll stay engaged -- at this point we are most concerned about what's going to happen to the hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped in a small piece of land in (inaudible).

I -- the information we received is very close to what you've heard already. We stay in touch with people inside the no-fly zone, as well as people who are in Vavuniya on the receiving end of people who are managing to escape, plus in transfer (inaudible) for somewhat close to the area. We, ourselves, I think after several missions to Sri Lanka over the last months, so I think we have a pretty good information as much as possible under the circumstances, and I'll get back to that in the end of my statement a little bit more.

But for now what we are hearing is that it is unclear whether the army has entered the no-fly zone, but the fighting was pretty serious again because as of today in, well, the hospital there was one functioning makeshift hospital in (inaudible), and this hospital is going to be closed. The medical personnel did not return to this hospital because the fighting was very heavy in the area, and all of the patients are gone. It's not clear where exactly where they are, whether they were transferred to any other hospital or they were just taken to their homes. That's most likely what happened.

In two other -- I mean they're not even makeshift hospitals but areas where people were somehow collected for medical treatment close to the south of the no-fly zone, today there were 330 wounded and 60 killed,

and according to everybody we spoke to, these numbers are just a small fraction of the actual casualties because most, given that there are no medical facilities whatsoever, most killed and, you know, most of the wounded are simply not being brought there.

Which for us is an extremely alarming situation, especially given that the government, as you all probably know, have announced the final deadline for everybody to surrender. The final deadline is noon, April 21st, which is about 10 hours from now, and this is particularly alarming given that -- and now, you know, we're going back to the number of people who are trapped in this area because the government says that 3,500 managed to escape over the last couple of days, which leaves us with about 15,000, according to government estimates, because the latest we've heard from the government over the last two weeks was the amount of people trapped in the area is 50,000 people.

Now if we look at the estimates by the international community, as cited previously on this panel, we are talking about most likely more than 100,000. So the difference is quite significant, and it becomes more significant when we talk about what's the final assault is going to be like. So if by tomorrow noon we hear that another 15,000 people managed to escape the government-controlled areas, the government would assume that everybody remaining in the area is LTTs cadre and is fair game, which we do not believe is true, and we are extremely concerned for the fate of the civilians and what's going to happen

to them.

We are concerned that there's going to be a blood bath, as was pointed out by other international experts before, and we do think that essentially the international community has about 10 hours to make it crystal clear to both sides of this conflict, LTT and the government of Sri Lanka, that they will not get away with that; that unnecessary and unlocally lost civilians' lives would be considered war crimes, and the people who are responsible for that, including commanders, will be responsible, will be held accountable for that.

In terms of, I think, you know, one of the issues that hasn't been touched upon here is the whole humanitarian assistance. We also have to remember that people inside the no-fly zone are dying and probably not just because they are being shot at and presented with some leading biodisease and not because they didn't shelled, but also because of severe malnutrition and lack of assistance.

And I have to say this is not accidental because, as was briefly mentioned by my co-panelists, since September 2008 the government banned all international organizations' humanitarian agencies, from Vanni, and as of now there is not a single international person present in this area. ICRC was the only agency that was allowed to approach the area, but not in land; they were only allowed to evacuate people, and from some information we received as of today, the last food convoys came in about 10 days ago. So at this point the food shortage is really, really acute, and in

terms of medical supplies they are pretty much nonexistent.

I think some of you -- I mean we posted some of the photographs that we received from the no-fly zone of seriously malnourished children and adults, and I think they are a very good illustration of what's happening there.

I would just very briefly touch on the camps because, obviously, when we are talking about -- what we're talking about right now is, I think, we're probably past the point where meaningful humanitarian C-5 is possible. I really don't think that at this point anything will stop Sri Lankan armies from advancing. The question is, how will they advance, and to what extent civilians will be spared as they are supposed to under international law during this advance?

But the other question is, what's going to happen to people who did manage to escape the government's controlled areas? As much as we put full blame on LTT for not allowing people to leave, we did call it human shielding, we did say that human shielding is a war crime; however, I think we also have to remember that many people were not leaving, not just because they were physically prevented from leaving by LTT but because of massive LTT propaganda which, unfortunately, has a lot to do with reality on the other side, because people who managed to escape are being kept in detox internment camps, no matter what the government calls them: welfare villages, transit sites.

These are detox internment camps where people are denied

any kind of freedom of movement. The camps are surrounded by layers coiled with barbed wire, and, you know, I did check today whether the barbed wire is still there and it is, and whether the military presence is still there and it is. It did decrease somewhat due to certain international pressure, but it is still there, and just as I -- just, you know, I was checking my e-mails and, you know, received a response from one of the humanitarian forces who works in this camp, and she -- she was talking a lot about how people are terrified of talking to anybody from the outside.

There was apparently a journalist steward to one of the camps a couple of days ago, and people were told not to complain about any of the conditions, but also praise the presence of barbed wire and say that it is for their safety and they love the sight of it.

So we are aware that there are certain improvements and largely due to the work done by UNHCR, but, of course, you know, when we are talking about people who have been released -- whatever it is, 600 people -- we have to remember that about 97 percent of the people have been in these camps for about three months, and there is just much no end in sight.

As you might have noticed from Mr. Awad's statement, there are still no registration lists. We do not know what happening in the screening procedures. We know that finally, about a month ago I believe, UNHCR and ICRC were allowed at the final screening checkpoint at Amantai before the legal come into government's -- into these camps in

Vavuniya, but there were several other, as people crossed the government-controlled areas, there was a big screening process into (inaudible) system. Everything we understand, and nobody knows what's happening there.

When I was in Vavuniya in February, every day there were reports of people who ended up on Vavuniya while their relatives were kept behind. At that point at Amantai because at that point there was no presence in Amantai and into Anochi. And today pretty much we don't know what's happening, what has happened with these people.

Given Sri Lanka's pretty appalling record on disappearances, and that's something I worked on very closely, we are extremely concerned about the complete lack of transparency. As much as we fully understand the need for the screening procedures and, you know, both as people cross and immediately after, I do not believe that there is any justification for keeping people in indefinite internment in these camps.

As of now, the situation in hospitals apparently gets worse because many of the wounded again is just (inaudible). I just received someone of the workers who has access to the hospital. The hospital in Vavunya is completely overcrowded because buses of people with severe injuries have been delivered there, and at this point it is not clear to what extent NGOs will be able to assist those in the hospital.

At the point when I was there in February, NGOs were not allowed anywhere near the hospitals, and the government was claiming that

they can deal with everything on their own. I know that the situation has improved somewhat, but the big question mark is what's going to happen now that the influx is so large.

I would -- my final remarks would be about the issue of after, and I think it's becoming as crucial as ever. I have to say, you know, as you heard from, you know, my brief introduction, I have worked in many complex areas around the world and in many areas that can be considered sort of closed countries where the governments really don't want the outside world to know what's happening. And I have to say Sri Lanka's pretty unprecedented.

This is probably the first time in my career that I could not get into an ITT camp. It is incredible and incredibly cynical how the Sri Lankan government has managed to completely close these areas off from outside scrutiny. As you know, there are absolutely no journalists anywhere near the area of fighting, and they can see that some other conflicts that are happening in the world right now, there are very few where the situation is similar.

Forget the Vanni, forget the fight -- the no-fly zone.

Journalists are not allowed anywhere near Vavuniya. They cannot -- no outside observer can get into Vavuniya town without an MOG clearance. I don't know if you were following the British papers at all, but one of the very prominent British journalists whom I know very well was just not allowed to get into the country. He was turned away at the airport, and now the British

journalist tried to get to the hospital in Pumadai and to Vavuniya and was turned away at every single point.

At the same time, as you know, Sri Lankan -- I don't want to go into this whole area issue because it's huge -- but we have to remember that all that is happening, again it's the background of crack-down on civil society in Sri Lanka more broadly. So we cannot really rely on Sri Lankan civil groups, civil society groups and journalists, to report much from the area.

And finally, from everything we understand, relief agencies and local NGOs and choice groups were pretty much all threatened into silence, very effectively so. The government has been playing the, you know, access versus silence card very, very effectively. So we are not hearing as much as we would have heard from the U.N., from other, oh, I don't know from (inaudible) and other organizations that otherwise would have talked. And I think this situation is absolutely unacceptable, and I think anybody, the first question that anybody should be asking the Sri Lankan government is if everything is so good, as good as the government is saying, why are they trying to hide it so badly?

I have to say that there have been some serious attempts from the international community to (inaudible) the confusion, including the U.S. government, which we definitely welcome, and I do think that the fact that the situation is not worse and that there are people still alive in the no-fly zone is largely due to the international interventions. But we do not

think that overall the response has been adequate. And, of course, you know, we on our behalf are currently looking at, you know, for several -- several things, and then direct the government that needs to take a much stronger sense of what's happening.

For example, Japan. Japan is one of -- well, is the top biological donor to Sri Lanka, and unless the Japanese government takes a stronger stance on the situation, and we hope that maybe -- I mean I do not know to what extent the U.S. government can go ahead and encourage some stronger action on behalf of the other governments that would -- to make sure that the method is consistent throughout the international community. And we do believe that it's high time for the U.N. to start discussing the possibility of a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes committed by both sides.

I'll stop here.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you, Anna, and thanks to all the panelists for sobering and realistic assessment of a very complex situation.

We have time now for questions. In the interest of time, I'm going to suggest that we group two or three together and then give the panelists a chance to respond.

Let's start back here, one, then two, and three. One, two, three, um-hmm. Thank you, and please identify yourself.

MR. BRADY: Sure. My name is Dan Brady, I'm with CSIS. Thank you, all of you, for a very interesting presentation.

I wanted to ask you to comment on the nature of the obstacles that Sinhala Buddhist nationalism presented to the peace process, both in the short term in terms of assuring Tamil civilians in the North adequate human rights, and the long term, for example, getting the Sri Lankan government to concede what they play like implementing the 13th Amendment fully.

I was in Sri Lanka in 2006 for five months, and again for another four months last fall, and I was disturbed to see that kind of the rhetoric of -- this is a Sinhala Buddhist island, Tamils are guests here, that sort of thing especially in the South was getting worse, not better. There was less of a sense, in my mind, among Sinhala Sri Lankans, especially in the South, that there was a need to concede. If anything, the sense that the war militarily was going well for the government meant that there was less political concessions necessary.

So I would just be interested to hear any comments that you have about that. Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you very much. And this gentleman here?

MR. : I really thank the Red Cross and the doctors with those (inaudible) who are serving there.

MS. FERRIS: Could you please identify yourself?

DR. ELINGOLWIN : Dr. Sam Elingolwin from Philadelphia.

The imaginations, the U.S. government, United Kingdom,

everybody has been asking and asking and asking, and all the answers seem to be only chemical bombs and cluster bombs in the so-called safe zone and where people are living. In spite of all the diplomatic words, have you done anything to stop this instead of talking what happened before?

And the second question is I am glad, Mr. Owen, you are listening to all the other panelists who have been personally affected and not just listening to some blabbering, biased experts -- so-called experts. Can he answer, please, how can these communities live together in future? They can live only as slaves and masters. Do you see a possibility of these communities living together as equal?

MS. FERRIS: Thank you. And then we had a woman right here?

MS. HUDSON: Hi. My name is Ressa Hudson. I'm a people's psychology and relief Sri Lanka . You know, in the past couple months several powerful countries have called for an immediate cease fire, including the U.S. and the U.N. And I'm just wondering what kind of consequences or measures will be taken against the government of Sri Lanka should they continue attacks on stations, which it sounds like is going to get worse by the time we go to bed tonight. Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you very much. And the woman right up front, and then we'll give the panelists a chance to respond.

MS. : Hi. I would especially like to thank the last speaker because I think the urgency of the situation is terrifying, and I think it's very

unfortunate that all humanitarian agencies that have been not receiving advice, and from working on Sri Lankan human rights issues.

And the immediate concern -- and I think it's really tragic how they're, you know, lack of international media attention largely, and I think the urgency cannot be understated.

And one other questions being, as the State Department has also confirmed, that it seems to be inevitable now of, with this deadline, that there are going to be a lot more people dead and a lot more people in camps who aren't dead. And again, we didn't hear much from the UNHCR about the quality of the camps, and I appreciate Ms. Neistat for touching on that.

But you already are overcapacity mentioned, and there is not freedom, there is not access for humanitarian workers. And how do you propose, both with your constraints and with the State Department and NGOs to help facilitate once the deadline has passed, accommodating people who are in camps?

MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Okay, we've got a number of questions on Buddhist nationalists, what can be done to stop; how can communities live together; the consequences following a cease fire; and the quality of camps.

Who would like to jump in?

(No response)

Who would like to jump in?

MR. OWEN: Well, I'll say a couple of --

MS. FERRIS: Okay, we'll have (inaudible)?

MR. AWAD: Go ahead.

MR. OWEN: Well, you know, I mentioned when I was speaking that Sri Lanka is a very diverse country, and you can't just -- you shouldn't sort of simplify things as the Tamils, Sinhalese. It's a much more diverse and complex multiethnic country than that, and there certainly are elements of very strong Sinhala national, Buddhist nationalism at work in Sri Lanka. And I think it requires political leadership to bring those diverse elements of multiethnic, multicultural society together in a coherent way.

And so I think that's what is going to be required, strong political leadership at the top to say: We want to maintain Sri Lankan unity, and to do so we need to find a way that all of the people in Sri Lanka can live together. Without that strong political leadership at the very top, I think Sri Lanka is going to face continuing problems. So I think that's really the only answer as far as I'm concerned. You have to have strong leadership with the support of the international community, and the international community holding that political leadership responsible for the consequences of what happens.

On chemical weapons and cluster bombs, we've, of course, seen these reports. We're very concerned about that. We have made it clear to the government of Sri Lanka that this would be totally unacceptable. We have tried to find evidence of the use of chemical weapons and cluster

bombs, and we have not been able to find such evidence. But if anyone can provide that, we'd be very interested.

There are, I know, a lot of stories, but we have still not been able to find any evidence that either of those weapons are being used by either side at this stage.

And someone asked about consequences if the government of Sri Lanka does attack the safe zone and large numbers of civilians are killed. Certainly, there would be consequences, and we've made it very clear to the leadership of the government of Sri Lanka there would be strong consequences if that occurred. I would not want to sort of tie our hands in terms of specifying exactly what those consequences would be, but we would certainly hold the government of Sri Lanka responsible for the death of a lot of civilians, and we've made that very clear to the leadership.

MS. FERRIS: Okay?

MR. SARVANATHAN: Right, on the account just adding to what I have said earlier and then essential human rights which were also highlighting some of these initial (inaudible) screening in Amantai where we have access along with ICFT, but unfortunately, we do not have access to the ITTs themselves. So we are asking the government again, while we gained access civically to Amantai, we were not able to have access to the ITTs themselves, and the military people at the checkpoints who (inaudible).

At the last communication I have from the government is that

UNHCR would be given access to the region military forces services, who are responsible for people and especially we should find. We don't have the exact

(inaudible) with the organization, and everybody (inaudible) in Sri Lanka as far as the military forces services and their internal laws of the government's handling of elderly people, of children, people with special needs. So I welcome that and time will tell if we get access this time around.

As to the other conditions that we have laid out in the Memorandum of Understanding and the Aid Memo -- (inaudible) back in September, and then in January as the people started coming. we said we will give the Americans a three-month period to see how the government will address some of the concerns that we have. We have to look at it along with the international community on the basic principles as far as the conditions of the ITTs in the camps.

That three-months period started the 2nd of February, so it goes until the beginning of May. But we did not want to wait until the three months are over. What we did is we undertook an assessment, an inventory of achievements and the deficits, and we have sent a memorandum to the government at the highest level, and we have shared it with our fellow U.N. agencies, and the special representatives, the Attorney General, the human right of IDPs as a (inaudible) -- and share it with Undersecretary General Holmes. We shared it with many of the donors countries that represented Sri Lanka and they are concerned about

the situation of the IDD.

Now, it is very -- the situation as far as achievement and deficit is very clear in black and white, and we put it before the government to act on it. We welcomed the initiatives that are taken by the government, although the numbers are negligible compared to of the people released from the camps, whatever category of a special need they are, negligible compared to tens of thousands that are in the camps, and the basic principle of freedoms movement has to be met one way or another by releasing everybody, by screening people and, of course, help with the screening. And it shouldn't be then a collective punishment.

That is our understanding. We will forcefully advocate that, and the government (inaudible), and the government is going to be responsible and do that, so we will continue to push these issues forward.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you. I think we have time for another round of questions. Maybe we'll start towards the back. This woman here?

MS. YOUNG: Thank you. Miriam Young with the U.S. Council on Sri Lanka, and I have two questions. One is for Mr. Awad.

Secretary John Holmes and Walter Kalin have made multiple trips to Sri Lanka, and they've been given quite series of promises by the government in terms of the running of the camps and what's happenings with the ITTs, however almost none of those promises have been kept. And I wonder what exactly your plan is, given that you can continue to ask the government for these things, but it has not happened.

Second, I have just a question for Mr. Sarvanathan, and you have talked about a post-conflict situation and the hope that there will be moderate Tamil leaders coming up and truly working for democracy. And I wonder if you could -- how do you envision that, given that the reason for the actual armed insurgency came about because the original grievances never were addressed? And at this point whatever Tamil groups there are, are all armed. Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you. And we have one over here?

MS. SAMUEL: Hi. My name is Melissa Samuel, and I'm a graduating Master student at SAIS. I'm focusing on international law. Thank you very much for presenting today, and I had a question based on what Mr. Owen mentioned, which was the possibility of exchanging arms for amnesty. And I was wondering what the other panelists' perspectives were. Is there likelihood that that would occur and the repercussions of that on the civil society after, hopefully, that this ends? Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you. And the last one in this round on this side here?

MR. LABUHETI : My name is Mebi Labuheti. The question is to Mr. Owen. You advocated a pause in the conflict to permit the civilians to leave. Given the fact that the civilians are being used as a human shield by the (inaudible), they would naturally do everything in their power to prevent them from leaving. And even the current 35,000 that who left was because there was because there was a possibly brief meeting maybe in the

(inaudible) and that would not have been possible at this time in the (inaudible).

Therefore expecting of to release the civilians or for them to leave, to have called is highly unlikely then, considering the fact that they are going to be kept trapped by the LTT.

A related fact you also mentioned was that there would be -- you are not planning to come to some arrangement where they will surrender their arms and arrange for some kind of amnesty. Given what Dr. Sarvanathan has said, if there are so many armed LTT people in the international arena, and if this leadership is given an amnesty, what possible hope would there be for a later political solution given that they have been the obstruction, providing the obstruction, for any kind of political solution to be negotiated? Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you very much. Another set of questions, and before the panelists respond, maybe I could sneak one in for Anna, since you hasn't gotten one specifically made.

You mentioned the possibility of an aid for a Commissioner of Inquiry to look into war crimes on both sides. And what do you see is the relationship between this drive for justice, if you will, and prospects for negotiating a cease fire for peace?

But let me ask the other panelists to jump in on some of the questions.

(No response)

Now, you don't look like a shy bunch to me.

MR. AWAD: Okay, I think there was one question from the floor on the remark as made by the Walter Kalin and (inaudible) Holmes and the promises given by the government, and what is next?

I think this time around there is a time frame, and this time around also some of the donors very clearly it's been their position that assistance would be only be given to emergencies for emergency assistance, and perhaps nothing in the way of development assistance if conditions in the camp are not improved. So I am seeing donors that are responding to those conditions.

The U.N. established normally these conditions, yet and we're are still engaged at least in the case of UNHCR with the government day to day is not improving the conditions for IDD.

For us also there cannot be conditional, because our condition would be to stop assistance to IDPs for example. We are not a bilateral donor; we cannot -- it's not a political negotiations, it's humanitarian negotiations and humanitarian development.

But we advocated to the government on many of the issues that I have -- we have defeat, and many of the donors and the bilaterals have leverage with the government of Sri Lanka.

MS. FERRIS: Mike, would you like to respond?

MR. OWEN: Well, there was a question here at the end specifically for me which I would be happy to respond to on these sort of end

games that we're working towards. I just want to emphasize this is what we would like to see happen, but we don't have any illusions that this is easy to engineer. It's something that we've been working on very hard and quietly behind the scene, because we see -- the only potential we see to bring this to an end is to have a package in which we have a pause, and the civilians were allowed to leave. And now it's very clear that many civilians do want to leave in spite of the fact the LTT has said earlier they do not want to leave. They do in fact want to leave.

So what we would like to see is a package in which there is a pause, and then during that pause, not only do the civilians leave but we also make some arrangements between the government and the LTT that would involve trading off surrender of arms for a limited amnesty. The government of Sri Lanka has previously offered a limited amnesty. This would be for the lower level LTT cadre, not the leadership.

And so I think one of the big questions is what to do about the leadership, and that's certainly not easy to answer. But you're quite right, this is a very complex and very difficult sort of thing to orchestrate. There are many problems, and we are running out of time. We really, literally, have a matter of a couple of days maybe in which we can try to get this finalized.

So we are working on it, but I don't want to raise expectations that we're close to a comprehensive agreement. But we, you know, we want to play any sort of helpful role we can to try to bring it to a peaceful

conclusion.

MS. FERRIS: Muttakrishna?

MR. SARVANATHAN: Yes, I will answer. There was a question about revival of democratic time in politics. It is not that the entire Tamil democratic politics is -- I mean is by the ex- so-called ex-militant groups. There are some political parties like (inaudible) Liberation Front, and Tamil Congress which has been historically a democratic party, they never took up arms.

And as regards to the so-called ex-militant groups who are either a (inaudible) government or somewhere in the middle, they have to be disarmed before entering. I think, government should ensure that they have to disarm before entering any elections or political processes like they would expect from the LTTE. There cannot be any double standards on that, so I think the common people, by and large, expect that.

You may have known that recently the Tamil (inaudible) Liberation Front leader, (inaudible) friend we had with the Monavonia and some eastern parts, and Jaffna as well, to revise the political offices in those places, anticipating sort of democratic political process in the streets there.

As regards one of the previous questions whether the border communities, what the main communities of Sri Lanka could live together. It's, to me, to be decided by the Sri Lankans of all ethnicities who are presently living in Sri Lanka. It cannot be decided by the diaspora community, relates to Tamil diaspora or the Sinhala diaspora. They have

come here for good, I am glad that they are here, I wish them all well, but please don't interfere too much in the domestic politics. That has to be determined by the people -- not myself, not by yourself. It has to be determined by the people of Sri Lanka who are domiciled there and who still hold positions there, and they are the last sort of -- they have the last say on that. Thank you.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Anna?

MS. NEISTAT: On peace versus justice? Well, it's very, and Humans Rights Watch wasn't very clear, it wasn't very (inaudible) on that. We do not sacrifice justice. We believe that -- and especially I think Sri Lanka is a very good example of that -- that, you know, it's a lack of accountability, historically undermines any peace efforts long term.

So I do think that as much as -- you know, I kind of -- I really, as much as accountability is, or was a very big issue for Human Rights Watch, and I do believe that a Commission of Inquiry may be truly justified. I really, you know, through the whole day today why we should have this debate, and actually, I don't want to move there yet because for now I do think that, you know, I mean it's -- you know, that's what we do in many conferences, we come there afterwards and, you know, we count the dead and look for who is responsible. We're not there yet, so I really want to -- I mean I really would like to focus for now on what can be done to actually save the people who are trapped there.

But, yes, I do think that the message has to be absolutely

clear to both sides of the conflict that what's happening there is not essentially a humanitarian disaster, and, yes, you know, civilians do die in wars. But the way they're dying right now may well point out to -- well, definitely point out to violations of humanitarian law and may well point out the war crimes being committed, and for that there needs to be accountability.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you. Thank you all for coming out on a rainy afternoon to our panelists. I think that, you know, one of the reasons we wanted to schedule this session was just seeing that there needs to be much more public attention as to what is actually going on in Sri Lanka. And if anything, the panelists have certainly underscored the need to keep attention focused on a very delicate and challenging operation.

Thank you all very much.

(Applause) * * * * *

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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