

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

March 23, 2009

09 MAR 25 AM 10:14

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your March 11 letter expressing concern over the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka.

Your letter touched on many of the points that State Department officials have raised in meetings with Sri Lankan government officials in Washington, as well as in Colombo, Geneva, and New York. We agree that a lasting peace in Sri Lanka will only be achieved through political inclusion of all of Sri Lanka's minority communities. We continue to urge the Sri Lankan government to devise a post-conflict political solution that will demonstrate to Sri Lanka's Tamil population and the Tamil Diaspora that the government is serious about political inclusion. We have called on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to allow civilians freedom of movement and to discuss modalities for ending hostilities.

In the past week, State Department officials have engaged the Sri Lankan government on the humanitarian issue. On March 13, I called Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to express my deep concern over the deteriorating conditions and increasing loss of life in the Sri Lankan government-designated "safe zone." In my conversation with President Rajapaksa I emphasized that the Sri Lankan Army should not fire into areas where civilians are trapped in the conflict zone. I urged President Rajapaksa to devise a political solution to the ongoing conflict, and I pressed him to give international relief organizations full access to the conflict area and displaced persons camps, including screening centers. I condemned the actions of the Tamil Tigers who are reported to be holding civilians as human shields and to have shot at civilians leaving Tiger areas of control.


Due in part to the State Department's efforts here in Washington as well as our Embassy's tremendous work in Colombo, access for the international organizations to the safe zone has improved. However, much more remains to be done, particularly in allowing medicine into the safe zone and stopping the

shelling. On March 15 and 16 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was able to evacuate over 900 wounded people from the safe zone and will likely conduct additional evacuations in the coming days. In addition, the World Food Program completed a shipment of 500 metric tons of food on March 13 and another shipment of 500 metric tons on March 19. The majority of this food assistance has been donated by the U.S. government.

The State Department continues to press the Sri Lankan government to provide adequate conditions in internally displaced persons' camps. We have urged, and the government has agreed, to allow UN agencies and the ICRC greater access to the camps, including monitoring the treatment of displaced persons. We also continue to press the government to permit full ICRC and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights access to all screening centers. The international community has started planning for the post-conflict period and remains committed to returning displaced persons to their homes as quickly as possible. The international donor community in Sri Lanka has also agreed on certain guiding principles for post-conflict donor assistance. These principles include the Sri Lankan government's good faith effort towards political inclusion, credible power-sharing, and respect for human rights.

I share your concerns about the need to protect Sri Lankan journalists and freedom of speech and the State Department has taken steps to assist those who have been threatened. Our latest *Country Report on Human Rights* documents a broad decline in fundamental human rights and the failure of the government to prosecute abusers. However, because it is based on the 2008 calendar year, the report does not document the increase in the targeting of journalists since January 2009. Our Embassy in Colombo continues to raise publicly and privately – with the Sri Lankan government – the need for media freedom and an end to the culture of impunity for those who commit human rights abuses.

Sincerely yours,

  
Hillary Rodham Clinton

