



For immediate release

Campaign calls on new EU Foreign Minister to demonstrate EU leadership over humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka

Welcoming Baroness Ashton's appointment as the new EU "foreign minister", the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace & Justice (SLCPJ) today released a statement – signed by an international group of eminent Advisers – calling on her to ensure that the EU stays true to its principles and continues to show leadership over the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka.

Commenting on the growing debate about Sri Lanka, Edward Mortimer, the Chair of the Campaign said, "It is clear that the EU's reluctance to extend Sri Lanka's highly privileged "GSP+" access to its market, combined with the recent US State Department report and growing criticisms from NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others, is having an impact on President Rajapaksa and his advisers.

"But the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) continues to mete out unjust treatment to those who have suffered huge trauma and are now stricken by poverty and trapped in overflowing and/or inadequate detention centres, cut off from the support that NGOs and UN are willing to provide but banned from giving. The inhumanity is staggering and hard to reconcile with our personal impressions of Sri Lanka gained from acquaintance with wonderful and humane individuals from all parts of the Island."

"The SLCPJ therefore calls on the EU to continue to insist on the release and re-settlement of the internees in keeping with international standards and by the target dates set by the GoSL; and to require that the GoSL set out clear plans about how this timetable will be met."

"Nor can we forget that some 12,000 people alleged to have fought with, or otherwise been associated with, the LTTE are being held in separate camps. We know that the Sri Lankan authorities have engaged in various forms of mistreatment of prisoners, including torture, during detention and ensuing interrogations. So there is every reason to fear that basic human rights, as well as basic norms of humane treatment under international humanitarian law, are not being respected. Until the Government of Sri Lanka allows the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as international human rights monitors, to have full access to all these people, the international community must assume the worst is happening, and must not condone it."

"Baroness Ashton now has an opportunity to ensure that the EU takes the lead in putting innocent civilians ahead of commercial interests or geopolitical manoeuvring. Anything less would be a serious failure of EU foreign policy at the very moment when everyone is looking to her to give it a fresh start. This is why we firmly believe that Baroness Ashton and the EU will hold firm to these principles, and act accordingly in response to the situation in Sri Lanka."

The SLCJP also makes specific demands of, amongst others, the Government of India, the Commonwealth and the UN Secretary General. For details of the full statement see <http://www.srilankacampaign.org/theconflict.htm>

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