

Letter to President Obama About Violence in Sri Lanka

February 3, 2009

Dear President Barack Obama:

We write with great concern about the escalation of violence and humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka has been pressing its assault against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), hoping to eradicate the last of their forces. However, an estimated 250,000 civilians or more are caught in an ever shrinking space in the Wanni Region. Through Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and our predecessor bodies, we have had close partnerships with the churches and church-related institutions in Sri Lanka for nearly 200 years. We have received urgent messages from our partners requesting from the international community support and protection for the civilian population.

Hundreds of civilians have been killed and thousands wounded from aerial bombing and repeated shelling by government forces. Pastors of our partner churches have been wounded by shelling while in purported safe areas. Two hospitals and a children's home have been hit. There is a severe shortage of food, medical staff and supplies, and shelter. Neither the government nor the LTTE has shown respect for international humanitarian law in the protection of civilians. In addition, freedom of expression is under assault. Journalists have been threatened, attacked and killed for raising concerns about the government's conduct.

We urge U.S. officials to work to end the violence in Sri Lanka and to raise the issue publically. We ask your Administration to implore the Government of Sri Lanka to cease hostilities long enough to allow passage to safe areas by the civilians, for ambulances to remove the wounded, and for delivery of urgently needed food and supplies. Safe areas then must be respected by all parties. Finally the U.S. should insist that United Nations and international humanitarian organizations have access at all stages in order to assist the government to protect and care for the civilian victims of this war. We welcome your response and an opportunity to discuss the matter further; please contact us directly or through Michael Neuroth, UCC Policy Advocate for International Issues, 202-543-1517.

Sincerely,

Rev. John H. Thomas, General Minister and President United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, General Minister and President Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, Executive Minister, UCC Wider Church Ministries & Co-Executive, Global Ministries

Rev. David A. Vargas, President Disciples Division of Overseas Ministries & Co-Executive, Global Ministries

Cc: Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State

Cc: Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia

Cc: Senator John Kerry, Chair, Committee on Foreign Relations and Subcommittee on Near East and South and

Central Asian Affairs

Cc: Senator Richard Lugar, Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Relations

Cc: Congressman Howard Berman, Chair, Committee on Foreign Affairs

For More Information

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