

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesman

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STATEMENT BY GORDON DUGUID, ACTING DEPUTY SPOKESMAN

Humanitarian Situation in Sri Lanka

On March 13, Secretary Clinton called Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa to express the United States' deep concern over the deteriorating conditions and increasing loss of life occurring in the Government of Sri Lanka-designated "safe zone" in northern Sri Lanka. The Secretary stated that the Sri Lankan Army should not fire into the civilian areas of the conflict zone. The Secretary offered immediate and post-conflict reconstruction assistance and she extended condolences to the victims of the March 10 bombing outside a mosque in southern Sri Lanka. She condemned the actions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are reported to be holding civilians as human shields, and to have shot at civilians leaving LTTE areas of control.

Secretary Clinton called on President Rajapaksa to devise a political solution to the ongoing conflict. She urged the President to give international humanitarian relief organizations full access to the conflict area and displaced persons camps, including screening centers.

The United States believes that a durable and lasting peace will only be achieved through a political solution that addresses the legitimate aspirations of all of Sri Lanka's communities. We call on the Sri Lankan Government to put forward a proposal now to engage Tamils who do not espouse violence or terrorism, and to develop power sharing arrangements so that lasting peace and reconciliation can be achieved.