

Secretary-General's press encounter following the Security Council's informal interactive discussion on Sri Lanka

SG: I have just briefed the members of the Security Council on my visit to Sri Lanka. As you know, and as I have already briefed the members of the General Assembly, I had three objectives in my visit two weeks ago. First and foremost, to provide all necessary humanitarian assistance to more than 300,000 displaced persons and also urging the Sri Lankan Government to allow unimpeded access by the international humanitarian workers, including the United Nations agencies. I am told by Sri Lankan Government that the situation has improved since my visit, and the restrictions have been eased.

Secondly, to help those displaced persons and the Sri Lankan Government in their efforts to re-settle them to their original home provinces, and including the de-mining activities.

And thirdly, more fundamentally, to help the Sri Lankan Government to reach out to minority authorities, including Tamils and Muslims. This will be much more important in the longer term. And also I would like to ask the Sri Lankan Government to recognize the international call for accountability and full transparency. And whenever and wherever there are credible allegations of violations of humanitarian law, there should be a proper investigation. And, again, I would like to take this opportunity to warn against the risk of triumphalism in the wake of victory, after this military conflict. This will really hinder the ongoing efforts by Sri Lankan Government and people, and international community, in helping heal the wounds. It is very important at this time to unite and heal the wounds, rather than enjoy all this triumphalism in the wake of the end of conflict.

I am very grateful for all the very kind support and comments made by the members of Security Council for the continuing role at my level, as well as the United Nations humanitarian agencies. The challenges still remain huge and enormous. This requires international assistance and help. And the United Nations stands ready to continue providing humanitarian assistance and we also remain ready to facilitate ongoing efforts by the Sri Lankan Government in healing the wounds through national reconciliation and through inclusive political dialogue. Thank you very much.

Q: The three doctors that were taken by the Government, that were in the conflict zone – they have now said that they are all going to be put on trial - there was a BBC report. And also, that some people are being taken from the camps. What's the UN going to do about those two issues?

SG: I would like to urge, again, to the Sri Lankan Government to follow-up [on] the agreement which had been made during my visit, which was stated in the joint statement. I raised this issue to President [Mahinda] Rajapaksa and Foreign Minister [Rohitha] Bogollagama separately, and also at a joint meeting, to look after these three government doctors who are detained while they were engaged in humanitarian activities. The Foreign Minister assured me that he would look into this matter. I will continue to follow-up this issue.

SG: It is crucially important that the Sri Lankan Government follow-up on all the promises that they have made. Any inquiry, to be meaningful, should be supported by the members of the United Nations, and also should be very impartial and objective. I have been urging the Sri Lankan President on this matter. He assured me that he will institute the necessary procedures to ensure the transparency and accountability of this [process].

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, does this show a level of impudence on the United Nations part, that you are continually going to the Sri Lankan Government as a petitioner? There doesn't seem to be any 'right to protect' being asserted here – you are coming late to the conflict – there are allegations that there may be excesses of 20,000 people who died. If the other side of triumphalism is impudence, what is the lesson about the United Nations that we have learned from your experience in Sri Lanka?

SG: First of all, I do not agree with your point that the United Nations came late. From the beginning of this crisis, I have been constantly in contact with the Sri Lankan Government leadership, including at the level of President Rajapaksa . I have been making many telephone calls, all the time, even until just right before and after this conflict. And this is important that the Sri Lankan Government should take the necessary follow-up measures. And he committed to me that he would take all necessary procedures to follow-up on all this and to address all the remaining challenges. As I said, challenges still remain huge, and they can not do it themselves. Therefore, that is why the United Nations will continue to provide the necessary assistance, humanitarian and in other areas. It is also important that they should do their own work in reaching out, in healing the wounds which happened during the military confrontation.

Q: How is the UN going to follow-up, I guess, on the joint statement, and the commitments that the Government made?

SG: At this time, I am asking the Sri Lankan Government to take the necessary measures. And there are some areas which the United Nations and I, as the Secretary-General, have to do, as I said. And all these issues, political facilitation and accountability, I hope that the Sri Lankan Government will follow-up to implement the promises they made. Thank you very much.

Source: Off the Cut, Secretary General Office of the Spokesperson