

## NEWS

# US bemoans Sri Lanka inaction

THE United States this week criticised the Sri Lankan government's continued internment of hundreds of thousands of Tamils and Colombo's not taking steps towards a political reconciliation.

"President Rajapaksa did meet on Monday with representatives of the Tamil National Alliance, but in general there have been few other concrete steps to re-unite the country and begin to heal the wounds of a long war in such a way that all Sri Lankans feel they enjoy equal rights and opportunities," US Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake said on Wednesday, September 9.

Below are extracts relating to Sri Lanka of an address by Mr. Blake at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

"I would also like to touch on recent events in Sri Lanka, which I'm sure many of you have been following closely. The United States welcomed the cessation of fighting in Sri Lanka in May of this year and the apparent conclusion to the country's long-running conflict. Since then, the United States has encouraged Sri Lanka to heal the wounds of conflict by ensuring that the estimated 300,000 people displaced by the civil war are treated according to international standards and allowed to return to their homes as quickly as possible, and by working toward justice and reconciliation in order to build a democratic, prosperous, tolerant and united Sri Lanka.

"With respect to the internally displaced persons still in the camps, the Government of Sri

Lanka has made some progress easing camp congestion, and expanding access by humanitarian organizations, but we are concerned that those remaining in the camps still do not have freedom of movement. We have encouraged the Government of Sri Lanka to follow through on its pledge to return a majority of IDPs by the end of the year. Already this year, the U.S. has provided \$56 million in humanitarian assistance, mostly food aid. Other significant programs are aimed at helping the Sri Lankans accelerate the return and facilitate the resettlement of IDPs, such as \$6.6 million to international NGOs for demining, and DOD-funded, USAID-administered projects for vulnerable communities and reintegration of former combatants.

"The Government of Sri Lanka has made only very modest progress on political reconciliation with Tamils and Muslims. ... in general there have been few other concrete steps to reunite the country and begin to heal the wounds of a long war in such a way that all Sri Lankans feel they enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

"We have stressed to the Government of Sri Lanka that to achieve a lasting peace, it must promote justice and political reconciliation for all parties, including by ensuring accountability for past violations of human rights. We are also concerned about threats to press freedom in Sri Lanka, including the recent conviction of Tamil journalist J.S. Tissainayagam on terrorism charges. A successful, united post-war Sri Lanka is not possible without freedom of expression."



The American government is allegedly preparing a report into war crimes committed during the last days of the war, even as it criticises the Sri Lankan government for failing to find a political solution

## US 'preparing war crimes report'

THE United States State Department is preparing a report on war crimes committed by Sri Lanka to be presented to the US Congress next week, local media in Colombo reported quoting US Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues Stephen Rapp.

"There are situations that have already been handed to us. There is a report from the Department of State on the war in Sri Lanka due in Congress on September 21. Additionally the office, together with the Secretary for Global Affairs and the Secretary of State, has the responsibility to collect information on ongoing atrocities and it is then the responsibility of the President to determine what steps might be taken towards justice. Like the canary in the coalmine, we give the signal that something very serious is occur-

ring," Rapp was quoted as in a response to a question posed by the Time magazine.

The news of the report comes as the U.S. attended its first formal meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Council as a member on Monday, September 14. The U.S. was elected in June to the 47-nation council, which was criticized by the Bush administration for primarily denouncing Israel while ignoring abuses elsewhere. Washington left its observer seat on the council vacant during the last six months of President George W. Bush's second term.

The US says it will try to promote dialogue at a body it once avoided and heavily criticized.

"We will strive for discussions that are thoughtful, focused and open to all viewpoints and perspectives," U.S. Assistant Secre-

tary of State Esther Brimmer told the council.

The decision in May to seek a seat on the Geneva-based body after three years of staying on the sidelines was a major shift in U.S. policy in line with President Barack Obama's stated aim to closer cooperate with the United Nations.

Although the council is virtually powerless compared to the U.N. Security Council, its decisions carry considerable symbolic weight, particularly in the developing world, to which the Obama administration wants to reach out.

Brimmer, who acknowledged that the U.S.' human rights record is "imperfect," called on council members to try to "end this session with a more strengthened and robust human rights mechanism than we had before."

# Starvation, rape, killings, torture in Sri Lanka camps, Australia parliament told

## TamilNet

NOTING that "hundreds of thousands of innocent Tamils displaced by the military offensive are living in camps in appalling conditions. Moreover, foreign media channels have reported horrifying evidence of the worst violations of human rights, including starvation, rape, killings and torture. International agencies are calling for full access to these camps in order to provide life-saving treatment and medical supplies and to allow free and independent media

access," parliamentarian, John Murphy, appealed at the Australian House of Representatives on Thursday, September 13, "to all governments of the world who have respect for human rights, the rule of law and free speech to join together and call on the government of Sri Lanka to right the wrongs forthwith."

*More excerpts from Murphy's address follow:*

"To date, the Sri Lankan government has arrogantly refused free media and humanitarian access to these camps. Why is the Sri Lankan government hiding

from the truth? Surely providing unimpeded media and humanitarian access to these camps would provide a perfect opportunity for the Sri Lankan government to demonstrate that it is doing all it can to alleviate the suffering of the Tamil people. Clearly, the Sri Lankan government does not want the truth revealed.

"I am horrified to learn that a Sri Lankan journalist, Mr J S Tissainayagam, was detained for five months without charge in 2008 and has since been convicted and sentenced by the Colombo High Court to 20 years of rigor-

ous imprisonment...What an appalling assault on free speech by the Sri Lankan government. Australia, as a country that asserts the rights to freedom of speech and freedom of expression, including views on all matters of public policy, the behaviour of the Sri Lankan government is in direct conflict with our values as well as those of other democratic nations and, as such, must be loudly and publicly condemned.

"In a further assault on freedom of speech, an Australian United Nations official, Mr James Elder, was recently ordered by the

Sri Lankan government to leave the country because of comments he made about the military offensive and its impact on innocent civilians. Mr James Elder is a spokesman for the United Nations Children's Fund in Colombo and has made several statements on foreign television news channels and print media concerning the horrendous humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka...It is obvious that there exists no freedom of the press in Sri Lanka. The actions of the government of Sri Lanka must be condemned and must be condemned loudly."