

## The UK Column: Ending 'more of the same'

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The shooting dead of six civilians by military personnel at one of the Sri Lankan internment camps for 'displaced' civilians underscores the tensions in the camps. Photo AFP

# Anger erupts in Sri Lanka camps

SRI LANKA'S failure to rapidly resettle nearly 300,000 Tamils who survived the government's final onslaught against the Tamil Tigers and their further suffering under harsh conditions in militarised camps could result in growing bitterness, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake - the same day, the UN issued its strongest criticism yet of Sri Lanka's continued internment of the hundreds of thousands of displaced Tamils.

Mr. Ban also stressed the need to expedite "a serious, independent and impartial accountability

process to look into alleged violation of international law during the conflict as a critical part of moving forward and building peace in Sri Lanka", the UN said.

In a statement following his meeting with the Sri Lankan Premier, Mr. Ban noted that he had repeatedly brought up the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the political process and reconciliation, and accountability for alleged violations during the long ethnic war in his various telephone conversations with President Mahinda Rajapaksa and messages conveyed through visits by senior UN officials.

Mr. Ban underlined the importance of winning the trust and confidence of the population in the North, especially those in the IDP camps, as failure to do so could undermine the prospects for reconciliation.

Prime Minister Wickramanayake assured Mr. Ban that the Government was keen to implement earlier pledges to resettle all IDPs out of the camps by January, but he emphasized that much international aid was needed to facilitate these efforts, especially for de-mining.

Meanwhile, Mr. Walter Kaelin, a representative of the United

Nations secretary-general, said that civilians held in tightly-guarded camps should be granted freedom to ensure that Sri Lanka complied with its international obligations.

"Immediate and substantial progress in restoring freedom of movement for the displaced is an imperative if Sri Lanka is to respect the rights of its citizens and comply with its commitments and obligations under international law," AFP quoted Mr. Kaelin as saying.

Restoring freedom to the displaced "is becoming a matter of urgency," he said. "I remain parti-

cularly concerned about the slow pace of identifying those in the camps who do not pose a threat to security and the lack of transparent criteria in this regard," he added.

Mr. Kaelin said a clash over the weekend between troops and people interred in one of the barbed-wire ringed camps underscored the growing tensions and human rights abuses.

The incident "underscores how interning people in large and overcrowded camps not built for prolonged stays is in itself a factor detrimental to security," Mr. Kaelin said.



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