

# The Guardian

## Sri Lanka warns UN not to release war crimes report

**UN report reveals war crimes on both sides of civil conflict, but Sri Lankans fear it would harm ethnic reconciliation**



A Tamil woman with one of her children in May 2009, at the end of the civil war. The UN says both Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger rebels committed war crimes during the 26-year conflict. Photograph: Reuters

*Agencies, Colombo*

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Sri Lanka has warned the UN that publicly releasing a report on alleged war crimes committed as its civil war was ending could harm efforts at post-war ethnic reconciliation.

Gamini Peiris, the foreign minister, told reporters that the UN panel had overstepped its mandate and become an investigative rather than an advisory body to the secretary general, Ban Ki-moon.

The report handed to Ban last week criticised the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels

on their conduct and said there were credible war crimes allegations against both sides.

The UN has not released the report officially, but media reports have been describing sections of it.

"It's wrong to publish the report. It's equally wrong and unacceptable to take any steps at all on the basis of any findings or recommendations contained in the report," Peiris said.

"We are very conscious of the fact that the need of the hour is reconciliation. Does [the report] further that objective, or does it make the accomplishment of that objective more difficult than it needs to be?"

Ban's deputy spokesman, Farhan Haq, told media in New York on Wednesday that the report is expected to be released this week and that the secretary general's senior advisers have "completed their review of the report".

Many Sri Lankans are bemused at the push to investigate war crimes, now that the country is enjoying its first peace in almost 30 years. "We live in peace and harmony and now the UN wants to disturb the peace we achieved by defeating terrorism," M A V Upul Kumara, a 40-year-old farmer, told Reuters after signing a petition against the report sponsored by the nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya political party.

The UN panel's report says the conduct of the war was a "grave assault" on international law, alleging that the government and the Tamil Tigers had committed serious violations, including some that could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Tens of thousands of people died in the last five months of the quarter-century war that ended in May 2009.

The report accuses the government of large-scale shelling of no-fire zones where it had encouraged the civilians to concentrate, such as hospitals, a UN hub, food distribution lines and near Red Cross ships that came to pick up wounded civilians.

It says Tamil Tigers recruited children to its fighting forces, held civilians as human shields, used them as forced labour, and exposed them to danger by firing heavy weapons from nearby positions.

The panel also criticises UN bodies and international officials for not acting to protect civilian lives and not publicising casualty figures to show the human toll of the war.

The Tamil Tigers fought for 26 years to create an independent state for Sri Lanka's ethnic minority Tamils. The Sinhalese majority controls the government and armed forces. The UN says that between 80,000 and 100,000 people died during fighting.

Sri Lanka also experienced Marxist uprisings in 1971 and 1988-89, which the government crushed violently at the cost of more than 100,000 lives, primarily young, rural members of the Sinhalese community.

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