

Evidence of war crimes in Sri Lanka, leaked UN report claims

Sri Lankan forces tortured and executed detainees, while their Tamil Tiger enemies killed those trying to flee violence and used civilians as human shields, according to a leaked UN report into the last weeks of the long-running civil war.

By Dean Nelson, South Asia Editor

6:46PM BST 22 Apr 2011

The panel of inquiry report, which was commissioned by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, found there was credible evidence of war crimes in the last weeks of the conflict in the first half of 2009, in which tens of thousands of civilians were killed in heavy army shelling in the north of the island.



Sri Lanka was torn apart by civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the ruling government

The United Nations was expected to publish its report this week but delayed following protests from the **Sri Lankan** government which claimed it would harm a reconciliation process currently under way. The report is now expected to be published next week.

The report says it has authenticated video footage which showed naked and blindfolded prisoners being "kicked and forced to cower in the mud before being shot in the head at close range." Another film, broadcast on Channel Four News, showed a landscape of executed prisoners

including women and a young boy.

Rape and sexual violence in the last weeks of the conflict was under-reported, the panel found, but photographs of dead female Tamil Tiger 'cadres' indicated "rape or sexual violence may have occurred, either prior to or after execution."

Former UN spokesman in Sri Lanka, Gordon Weiss, who was the first senior official to warn that thousands of innocent civilians were being killed in army shelling of a so-called 'no-fire zone' in the north-east of the island, said their report will intensify pressure on the international community to now press for a full inquiry.

"In [the panel's] opinion there is credible evidence of the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, it's clear that both sides appear to be responsible for war crimes, and that the Sri Lankan government was responsible for the majority of the deaths through shelling," he said.

"There has got to be a proper international inquiry now because the 'prima facie' case exists, an overwhelming case to be answered for war crimes," he added.

G.L. Peiris, Sri Lanka's foreign minister, had earlier urged Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, to refrain from releasing the report he called "preposterous."

"The publication of this report will cause irreparable damage to the reconciliation efforts of Sri Lanka. It will damage the UN system too," he said.



© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2018