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Joint Statement by Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Donors Conference Regarding Violence in Sri Lanka

Following is the joint statement by Norway, the United States, the European Union, and Japan following their November 21, 2006, meeting as Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Donors Conference:

The Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Donors Conference - Norway, the United States, the European Union, and Japan - met in Washington, D.C. on November 21.

The Co-Chairs view with alarm the rising level of violence in Sri Lanka that has led to significant loss of life and widespread human rights violations. The Co-Chairs condemn the continued and systematic ceasefire violations by Government of Sri Lanka and LTTE. We call on both sides to seize the historic opportunity created by the 2002 Cease-Fire Agreement to resolve the country's conflict peacefully. Only by committing to sustained and substantive negotiations can the downward spiral of hostilities and human rights violations be reversed.

The Co-Chairs particularly condemn the LTTE for initiating hostilities from heavily populated areas and the Government of Sri Lanka for firing into such vulnerable areas and killing and wounding innocent civilians. The Co-Chairs call on both sides to respect international humanitarian law and set aside demilitarized zones to protect internally displaced persons.

The Co-Chairs recall the responsibility of both parties to guarantee the security of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission to fully exercise its mandate. The Co-Chairs were disturbed by the incident on November 8 when the Head of Mission of the SLMM came under fire. The Co-Chairs remind the parties of their responsibility to respect all rulings by the SLMM and to implement the Cease-fire Agreement fully, including re-opening the A-9 highway.

The Co-Chairs recognize that talks took place on October 28-29 in Geneva. However, we urge the Parties to the conflict to commit to a structured and sustained process of further negotiations without preconditions once a proposal is available, as indicated by the Government and welcomed by the LTTE delegation in Geneva.

The agreement between the Sri Lankan Freedom Party and the opposition United National Party should lead to a credible power-sharing proposal that can help form the basis for a viable negotiated settlement between the Parties. At the same time, the specific arrangements for the north and east should not be disturbed as they are fundamental to continuing the dialogue to achieve an agreement. The legitimate interests and aspirations of all communities, including the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala communities must be accommodated as part of a political settlement.

The Co-Chairs welcome the Government of Sri Lanka's progress in establishing a Commission of Inquiry for Human Rights with international observers. They condemn the growing violations of human rights by all sides and the fear that pervades civil society, politics and the media. The Commission of Inquiry and the Government should work promptly to bring the perpetrators to justice and to address the climate of impunity.

Citizens are caught in this conflict and agencies are unable to reach them. We recognize the efforts by government to provide essential supplies themselves and welcome the establishment of the consultative committee on humanitarian assistance that is addressing several humanitarian access issues for international agencies.

The Co-Chairs urge both parties to depoliticize the issue of humanitarian access and for the immediate, permanent and unconditional opening of the sea and road routes for humanitarian convoys of essential supplies. As a first step towards this, the Co-Chairs welcome the readiness of the Government to send one convoy via the A-9 highway to Jaffna and to allow International Non-Governmental Organizations with a proven track record immediate access to uncleared areas to restart their relief work. The Co-Chairs call on the LTTE to cooperate with such initiatives.

The Co-Chairs, together with other members of the international community, express their strong support for Norway's ongoing efforts to facilitate the peace process and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission's role in monitoring the Cease-Fire Agreement.