



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

15 June 2009

Dear Ms. Khan,

I wish to thank you for your letter of 2 June 2009 regarding the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. As you are aware, I briefed the Security Council on 5 June 2009 and highlighted the key humanitarian and human rights concerns which you mention in your letter.

I am continuing to press for enhanced humanitarian access to those in need of assistance, as I did during my visit to Sri Lanka as well as in my briefings to the General Assembly and the Security Council. The crucial importance of access was highlighted in my joint statement with the Government on 23 May 2009, which stated: "The Government will continue to provide access to humanitarian agencies." I have learned that, since my visit, the Government and the humanitarian country team have come to a practical agreement to ensure sufficient access for humanitarian vehicles to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps, and things are now improving again in this area. But I will go on monitoring this to ensure whether this addresses the basic protection and assistance needs of those in the camps.

On the protection of the IDPs accommodated in the camps, I strongly agree with you on the need to enhance freedom of movement and to facilitate family reunification. In addition, I have been pressing for management responsibilities for the camps to be handed over from military to civilian administration. We are also lobbying the Government to accelerate the registration process and issuance of identification cards as agreed during the visit of my Representative on the Human Rights of IDPs, Mr. Walter Kälin. I fear that if the camps retain their current character, including the severe restrictions on movement, it will become progressively more difficult to maintain outside assistance - even if those who will suffer most from reduced assistance will be the IDPs themselves. I have therefore encouraged Mr. Kälin to continue to engage with the authorities in Sri Lanka.

Ms. Irene Khan  
Secretary General of Amnesty International  
London

Irene Khan  
(SG Amnesty International)  
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Approved by:

Date: 15 June 2009

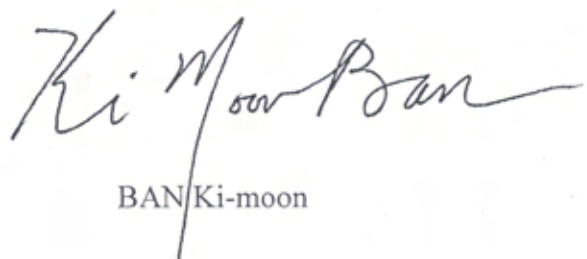
On the question of civilian casualties, I have consistently and repeatedly raised the strongest concern. The point is that, whatever the total, it is clear that the casualties in the conflict were unacceptably high. With regard to some reports in the media, I should emphasize that the final total is not yet known. The figure of 20,000 which has been cited does not emanate from the United Nations, privately or publicly. In any case, I categorically reject any suggestion that the United Nations has deliberately concealed or underestimated any figures.

With regards to accountability, I strongly urged the Government to recognise international calls for an inquiry, and repeatedly stressed the need for full accountability and transparency. In our joint statement, the Government agreed to "take measures to address those grievances". It is therefore critical that the Government follow up on this in good faith. I have stated publicly that it is the policy of the United Nations that, wherever serious and credible allegations are made of grave violations of international humanitarian laws, these should be properly investigated. Any international inquiry would of course require the full cooperation of the Government. I stand ready to provide any assistance the Government may require in the interests of justice, human rights and the political future of Sri Lanka. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights can also play a key role in such endeavours.

Finally, I share your concerns on the safety and welfare of the three doctors who worked so hard to save lives in the former conflict zone and now are in detention. I am continuing to advocate for their release with the Government of Sri Lanka.

Thank you very much again for your interest in the humanitarian and human rights situation of Sri Lanka, as well as the role of the United Nations in the post-conflict phase. It is important that we communicate with each other on the developing situation in the country. We need to continue to work together in order to ensure full humanitarian access, conditions in the camps in conformity with international standards and principles, and accountability for any human rights violations in Sri Lanka.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ki Moon Ban". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ki" and last name "Ban" being more prominent than the middle name "Moon".

BAN/Ki-moon