
LTTE responsible for sufferings of Tamil civilians: US

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Washington: Holding the Tamil Tigers responsible for the "increasing sufferings" of civilians in Sri Lanka's embattled north, the US on Friday asked the outlawed LTTE to stop lobbying shells and shooting guns out of the safe zone declared by the government.

US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher also called on the LTTE to stop the violence and allow the innocent Tamil civilians to flee the shrinking war zone. "Tigers have been shooting shells out of the safe zone. We call upon the government not to shoot back, but first and foremost the Tamil Tigers have to stop shooting. "That is where we are asking to stop the violence, let the people find safety, and then talk about how to end hostilities," said Boucher, who heads the South and Central Asian Affairs at the State Department. Talking to a group of South Asian journalists, Boucher insisted that the US call to stop fighting is to both the LTTE and Sri Lankan Government. "The Tamil Tigers by trapping them (civilians), by continuing the conflict are just increasing the sufferings of the Tamil people. So it is very much time for them to allow safe passage for them, to allow these people to leave," Boucher said. While the Government says there are only 70,000 people trapped in the war zone, aid agencies contradict the figure and say the number could be 200,000. "We are glad to see that the government managing to get some additional food supply to these areas this weekend," Boucher said. But that could not be the case with the Tamil Tigers. "We have seen the Tamil Tigers shelling out of that safe zone. We have seen them continuing hostilities in other places. So we believe that it is time for them to stop fighting and allow these people to go safely to other parts of safe places," Boucher said. It is only then there could be discussions on how to end hostilities. "Making political calls and statements, does not really count when you are still lobbying shells and shooting guns. It is time to stop shooting guns," Boucher said. "I encourage the Tigers to stop fighting and be willing to talk about how to end the hostilities," Boucher said in response to a question. Boucher said the United States has always "believed that there needs to be opportunities for Tamils, there needs to be respect for Tamils in Sri Lankan society, and there needs to be a political arrangement to have a stable political governance situation in the country." "These are the goals, which the US is continuing to press. But let's remember that respect for Tamils means that they should not be trapped in zones of the conflict," he said. Bureau Report Courtesy: Island.lk