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## Sri Lanka accuses aid groups of supporting war

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By Scott McDonald COLOMBO, Sri Lanka &ndash; Sri Lanka's military on Tuesday accused "a vicious coalition" of international aid groups of harboring terrorists and seeking to prolong the island's civil war for economic gain. The military has come under increasing international criticism as it pushes to end the decades-old war with the Tamil Tiger rebels, who are pinned in a shrinking war zone in the island's northeast.

Aid groups have accused the military of shelling "no-fire" zones set up to harbor the tens of thousands of civilians trapped by the fighting, a charge the military denies. The military, in a statement posted on the Ministry of Defense Web site, said aid groups operating in Sri Lanka had "hoodwinked" the world and did not want the war to end "to secure their income through a continued bloodshed." The statement said the war had "been well engineered and blessed by a vicious coalition of local and international bodies other than the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)." The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is the formal name of the rebels. The only group named in the statement was CARE International, which said last week that one of its local workers was killed in a "no-fire" zone when a shell severed his leg and he was unable to get medical care. The military said instead of being a trapped aid worker the man "was a hardcore LTTE cadre who was planted in the INGO (CARE) perhaps with the knowledge of its officials." It said he had been killed fighting on the front lines and not in a "no-fire" zone. Nick Osborne, the country director for CARE in Sri Lanka, declined to comment directly on the accusations. "The issue is very sensitive. Our response at this moment is to respect the loss of a staff member and give our thoughts to his family," Osborne said. Accounts of conditions and incidents in the war zone cannot be verified because independent journalists are barred from traveling to the north. The rebel holdouts &mdash; along with tens of thousands of terrified civilians the government says are being used as human shields &mdash; are confined to about 11 square miles (28 square kilometers) of jungle and beach on the northeastern coast. The United Nations says 150,000 to 180,000 civilians are trapped. The government puts the figure at 50,000 to 60,000. It also denies U.N. charges that 2,800 civilians have died in the war zone since late January. Human Rights Watch, a New York-based group, accused the military of "indiscriminately shelling the no-fire zone." The military has denied similar charges in the past. "We receive reports of civilians being killed and wounded daily in the no-fire zone, while the Sri Lankan government continues to deny the attacks," Brad Adams, the group's Asia director, said Tuesday. "The Tamil Tigers' use of civilians as human shields adds to the bloodshed." The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have begun fighting since 1983 for an independent state for the Tamil minority, which has suffered decades of marginalization at the hands of governments dominated by the Sinhalese majority. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting. Courtesy: yahoo.com