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# An Amnesty for the Tigers

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by Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General, Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process Amnesty International, with pertinacity worthy of the LTTE, has once more returned to the charge against the Sri Lankan government. As usual it begins its diatribe with affirming its principled balance between an elected government and terrorists, between legitimate armed forces who do not attack civilians and terrorists who do this as a matter of principle, between those who are seeking to free the trapped people Amnesty purports to care about and those who are entrapping them. Its first sentence then talks of people at increased risk from the "escalation in attacks" by the LTTE and the Armed forces. It does not mention here that those people have been deliberately attacked by the LTTE whereas there has been no evidence of this on the part of the armed forces. Amnesty then goes on to call for a humanitarian truce to allow aid to reach the civilians, ignoring the fact that the government has ensured that such aid has been flowing to them continuously, for the last several years. It does say that the truce is also needed to ensure safe passage for those who wish to leave, ignoring that what is needed for this is that the LTTE permits this. And, since this must by now be obvious to anyone, Amnesty goes back to its insidious balancing act by asking for pressure on Sri Lanka to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to camps for the displaced people in the region. This is followed by the customary quotation from Sam Zarifi, whose particular words of profound wisdom are thought by Amnesty enough to shore up the generalizations which he is also responsible for. As usual, he opens his mouth to imply a falsehood. "The deliberate firing on civilians by either side constitutes a war crime," is another example of his misuse of language, since the war crime is deliberate firing on civilians by any side. By introducing the word "either"; he seeks to imply that both are doing this, a claim for which he has no evidence at all. But that has never stopped Sam, who goes on to reassert the need for pressure on both sides. He makes no apology for the fact that Amnesty releases encouraged the Tigers to continue to hang onto their civilian shields, whereas less equivocation on the part of Amnesty might have prevented what he calls a "major humanitarian catastrophe". Amnesty then, in its little Jack Horner pulling out a plum tone, claims that it "has received credible and consistent reports that the LTTE has forcibly displaced civilians and pushed them into areas under their control in the Wannu, where they are effectively held hostage and used as a buffer against the Sri Lankan armed forces — a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law". The LTTE is also reported to have deliberately attacked civilians that have tried to escape from areas under their control. Such an admission has to have its counterpart, so the government is immediately condemned as having cut off international humanitarian assistance. This is itself is nonsense, since the government has been sending in much aid together with the ICRC, and even if Amnesty does not believe the government, it has had full access to ICRC reports. Equally significantly, there is no redeeming reference in this para to "reports", since Amnesty evidently takes pleasure in criticizing the government direct, whereas it has to soothe the Tigers by referring to third party reports when it dares to say anything about their behaviour. Then Amnesty does its usual dance about the facilities given to those seeking refuge, with three full paragraphs devoted to attacks on these, the last another citation of the eloquence of Sam Zarifi. The thrust is to suggest that perhaps the people would be far better off with the Tigers, which is precisely what the Tigers want. Thus, having devoted one sentence to simply reports of the Tigers keeping people hostage and using them as human shields, and an even more cursory sentence to what are simply described as attacks on civilians seeking to escape (no mention of the suicide bomb, the grenade, the shooting, the landmines and the obvious evidence of people dying as a result of these), Amnesty belittles all this brutality by saying that those who "risk their lives and flee face further ordeals when they enter government-controlled areas". Sam Zarifi, from his cosy little nook in Hampstead, or wherever it is Amnesty International types now hang out, obviously has no idea what an ordeal is. Everything he says about the arrangements for those seeking refuge, despite his propaganda and that of the Tigers, is totally mistaken. He obviously does not know that Sri Lanka has welcomed over 60,000 such persons in the last couple of months, so of course there is overcrowding, but does he really expect us to turn these people away, and ask them to go back to the Tigers and come back when we have more spaces ready to receive them? It is the transit camps, which he does not mention, that are overcrowded, whereas the welfare villages are well laid out, though there is still much work to be done on them. He is also infinitely stupid about the military presence, which he thinks puts civilians at risk, whereas it was the military that detected a suicide bomber recently near one of the camps, and made sure, at risk to themselves, that the bomb went off away from the camp. He is also obviously completely crackers if he thinks that the Sri Lankan government rejects international scrutiny, since it has recently hosted the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Walter Kälin. If by international scrutiny however Sam Zarifi means simply Amnesty International, which has long been requesting permission for a visit, he really must do better to convince us that Amnesty abides by international standards as far as the repudiation of terrorism goes. One paragraph about Tiger brutality and several paragraphs that the Tigers use to justify this brutality suggest a blatant disregard for humanitarian and human rights norms that is quite disgusting. It is not surprising that the latest Tiger propaganda exercise uses Amnesty pronouncements. What is surprising is that decent human beings like Irene Khan and Peter Splinter continue to associate with liars and apologists for terror. Courtesy: Island.lk