



DEFENSA DE NIÑAS Y NIÑOS INTERNACIONAL DNI  
DEFENSE DES ENFANTS INTERNACIONAL DEI  
DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL DCI

## Children Paying Highest Price for Conflict in Sri Lanka

6 May 2009

Defence for Children International (DCI) is deeply concerned about the dire consequences of the armed conflict on children in Sri Lanka's northern area known as the Vanni. Children continue to bear the greatest burden from the ongoing hostilities, being killed, injured, recruited and displaced by the conflict.

Defence for Children International reminds the combatants and the international community that children have the right to be protected in armed conflict. In accordance with article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as its obligations under international humanitarian law, Sri Lanka "shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict". No exception can be made to this principle regardless of the type of war or conflict.

Today in Sri Lanka's northern district of the Vanni, tens of thousands<sup>1</sup> of children are being shelled, bombed and starved while trapped in a several kilometer square area with their families, encircled by the Sri Lankan military and the fighting forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Both parties have been accused of committing serious violations of international humanitarian law in complete disregard of the civilian population.

At least a thousand children have been killed in the non-government-controlled enclave in 2009<sup>2</sup>, with many more surviving with wounds that will maim them for life.

Children and other civilians have been prevented from fleeing the conflict zone, while shelling and bombing on over 150,000 civilians in an extremely confined space is causing devastating casualties. An embargo is threatening starvation and preventing medical care for those who survive. Children are the most affected by deaths in their family, malnutrition, displacement and no access to education or medical care.

Children who leave the threatened enclave are screened by the Sri Lankan military without international monitoring, and there are allegations of enforced disappearances. Those children who survive the screening are placed in military-guarded internment camps indefinitely, often separated from their families and without means of communication. Those placed in hospitals are not permitted family accompaniment. Conditions in the internment camps are reported to be well below international standards for food, shelter, medical care and education, along with the aforementioned freedom of movement.

DCI is disturbed by the government's refusal to allow humanitarian agencies and the international media access to the area. After 25 years of war, both parties must

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, April 20, 2009

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initiate a political settlement and a reconciliation process that recognises the rights of all communities, and puts the interests of children first.

DCI calls on all parties of the conflict to cease the ongoing violence against the civilian population, especially children, and to commit to a lasting ceasefire.

DCI calls on all parties to heed the Geneva Conventions by protecting the civilian population, including children, and ensuring that they can flee and be brought to safety. Displaced children must not be detained indefinitely and arbitrarily. All parties to the conflict must abide by their obligations to international humanitarian law.

DCI calls on Sri Lanka to heed the Security Council's request to facilitate humanitarian access to the crisis zone and to cooperate with all missions to assist the civilian population.

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