

## **Sri Lanka, conflict endangers trapped civilians, children**

Some 250,000 civilians remain trapped in the conflict zone of Sri Lanka's Wannu region to the North in what has become a full blown humanitarian crisis, requiring heightened international attention and support.

As government forces round the third week of their offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the plight of civilians has escalated with innumerable deaths and injuries. Cornered communities have been forcibly detained in LTTE controlled areas, and are increasingly vulnerable to being used as human shields. Those trapped also face diminishing water and food supplies, as well inadequate medical services.

World Vision is particularly concerned about the impact of this situation for as many as 50,000 children who are in harm's way. We call on all parties to protect and care for children in this crisis, consistent with duties and obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Optional protocol on children and armed conflict.

*"It is heartbreaking to see children caught up in the center of this conflict, as they have already suffered so much over the years, including for some as tsunami survivors and child soldiers. Extraordinary provisions must be made to ensure their well-being in both conflict and safe areas, in schools and in swelling camps for those displaced by the fighting"* stated Dave Toyce, World Vision Canada President.

In the face of this humanitarian crisis, World Vision has issued a joint statement with the United Nations and other members of the humanitarian community calling on the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to accord priority to ensuring the safety and security of all civilians. This includes facilitating safe passage out of affected areas, and respecting the 32 km 'safe zone' within the Wannu, declared by the Sri Lankan government on 22 January.

World Vision Canada appreciates the recent Parliamentary debate on the urgency of the situation, and recognizes the statements by the Foreign Minister, the Honorable Lawrence Cannon, that underscore the need for a return to the peace process, the rule of law and democratic values, including freedom of expression. We particularly support the Minister's call for a humanitarian ceasefire to allow affected populations safe passage and urgently needed medical services and care.

As the national army's offensive has reclaimed significant territory, we call on Canada and other members of the international community to support the government of Sri Lanka in taking immediate steps for the outlining a durable peace process and plan that addresses the root causes of the conflict, that works to empower communities and local governance, and that helps restore basic services and critical infrastructure. We applaud the Canadian government's recent commitment of 3 million dollars in humanitarian aid to affected populations, and call for generous post-conflict recovery aid to bolster and hasten efforts at sustainable peace and development.