

UN News

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Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today reiterated the need to protect civilians trapped in the area of conflict between the Government and Tamil rebels in northern Sri Lanka, voicing concern at reports of heavy casualties, restrictions on movement and forced recruitment, especially of children.

The Secretary-General is deeply distressed by continuing reports from the Vanni region of Sri Lanka that civilians are at extreme risk, with heavy casualties, and that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are keeping civilians in a very small area of active conflict against their will, his spokesperson said in a statement.

The UN estimates that approximately 150,000 to 190,000 civilians are trapped in the nearly 58-square-kilometre conflict zone. While some civilians have been able to leave or escape, the world body said that reliable reports indicate that the LTTE have prevented others from leaving, including by firing at them.

The Secretary-General calls upon the LTTE leadership to allow civilians to leave the conflict area of their own free will. The severe restrictions of the LTTE on their freedom of movement violate international law, the statement said, adding that Mr. Ban also deplores the forced recruitment of civilians, particularly children.

At the same time, the Secretary-General again reminds the Government of Sri Lanka of its responsibility to protect civilians, and to avoid the use of heavy weapons in areas where there are civilians, as promised, according to today's statement. ()

Full text of the article: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30388&Cr=sri+lanka&Cr1=>