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Louis Michel calls for respect of international humanitarian law in Sri Lanka

Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, has expressed his grave concern over the escalation of the conflict in Sri Lanka and the effects on innocent civilians.

Commissioner Michel said, "I'm deeply troubled by the escalation of the violence in Sri Lanka and the terrible impact it is having on the lives of so many innocent civilians. The situation is made all the worse because international relief efforts are having to be suspended because the safety of humanitarian workers cannot be ensured. I would remind all sides to fully respect international humanitarian law."

Following the Government of Sri Lanka's request for UN and international organisations to withdraw from the conflict area, many thousands of innocent civilians trapped by the conflict will lose access to essential humanitarian supplies. In addition these people are currently unable to leave the conflict area because of restrictions imposed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and lack of secure escape routes to safer areas.

The Commissioner stressed that both parties to the conflict should respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. These include not just ensuring the safety and free movement of civilians - but also ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches people in need. He said: "Both sides should guarantee the safe transit of humanitarian convoys with food, medical and other essential supplies to people in need. Independent humanitarian observers should be allowed to accompany the convoys to ensure that supplies reach those in need without discrimination. And civilians should be guaranteed safe passage to leave the conflict area and relocate in safer areas."