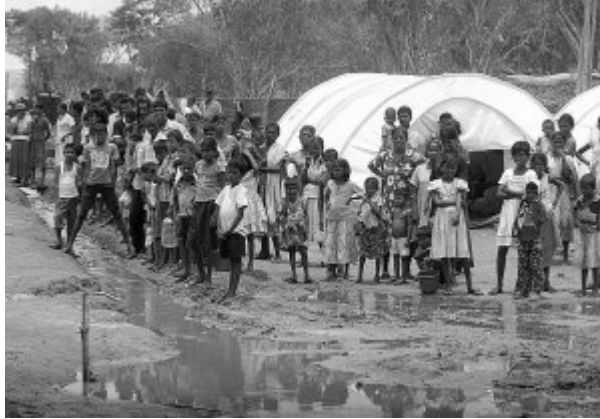


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## **Human Rights Watch**

### **Sri Lanka: Execution Video Shows Need for International Inquiry**



Internally displaced people (IDPs) stand near temporary structures in the Arunachalam camp at Manik Farm in northern Sri Lanka on August 19, 2009.

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The blood, blindfolds, and mud of this apparent atrocity makes nonsense of President Rajapaksa's claims of a clean war against the Tamil Tigers. An international inquiry needs to get to the bottom of this and other war crimes committed during the past year's fighting.

Steve Crawshaw, UN director

### **No Action on Government Promises of Investigations to United Nations**

August 26, 2009

(New York) - A disturbing video recently provided to the media showing the apparent summary execution of prisoners by Sri Lankan soldiers underscores the need for an international commission of inquiry into possible war crimes committed by both sides during the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, Human Rights Watch said today.

The video shows men in Sri Lankan army uniforms firing assault rifles point-blank at two naked, blindfolded, and bound men sitting on the ground. Eight other bodies are visible on the ground nearby, all but one unclothed. According to Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka, a multiethnic exile organization, the video was taken by a soldier with a cell phone in January 2009. While Human Rights Watch could not confirm the video's authenticity, an independent expert consulted found nothing in the

video that would dispute its authenticity. The summary execution of prisoners is a violation of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and a war crime.

"The blood, blindfolds, and mud of this apparent atrocity makes nonsense of President Rajapaksa's claims of a clean war against the Tamil Tigers," said Steve Crawshaw, UN director at Human Rights Watch. "An international inquiry needs to get to the bottom of this and other war crimes committed during the past year's fighting."

Human Rights Watch reported numerous violations of the laws of war by both the Sri Lankan armed forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam during the 25-year-long armed conflict, which ended with the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in May. Because independent observers, including the media and human rights organizations, were prevented from operating near the war zone, the information available on the fighting and potential laws of war violations by both sides has been limited.

Before the government could launch an investigation, a Sri Lankan army spokesman already labeled the video a "fabrication."

Human Rights Watch has long criticized the government's failure to carry out impartial investigations and prosecutions of those responsible for the numerous human rights abuses committed by both sides during the conflict. There have been serious ongoing violations of human rights, and the backlog of cases of enforced disappearances and unlawful killings runs to the tens of thousands. Only a small number of cases have ended in prosecutions. Past efforts to address violations through the establishment of ad hoc mechanisms in Sri Lanka, such as presidential commissions of inquiry, have produced little information and few prosecutions.

Human Rights Watch called for the United Nations secretary-general or other UN body to create an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate violations of the laws of war by all parties to the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, and to make recommendations for the prosecution of those responsible. On May 23, President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the UN secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon, issued a joint statement from Sri Lanka in which the government said it "will take measures to address" the need for an accountability process for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

In a July interview with *Time magazine*, Rajapaksa said that during the war, "[t]here was no violation of human rights. There were no civilian casualties."

"Since telling the UN secretary-general three months ago that he'd conduct investigations, Rajapaksa has sat on his hands," said Crawshaw. "Ban should stop relying on the president's promises of domestic action and make it clear that an international commission is needed if the victims of Sri Lanka's bloody war are to find justice."