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Clark Urges Humanitarian Measures in Sri Lanka

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, today expressed his concern over continuing instances of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka and the attendant erosion of the rule of law. Mr. Clark also pointed to growing shortages of food and medicine in northern Sri Lanka as causing severe hardship to the civilian population.

"While there has been some improvement in the general human rights situation in recent months, it is evident that a greater commitment will be required to ensure respect for the law and to bring the perpetrators of human rights to justice. It remains the ultimate responsibility of the Government of Sri Lanka, as the duly constituted authority, to ensure that rights are respected and to set the patterns of conduct for others to follow," Mr. Clark said.

With the current intense fighting between the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) there have been a significant number of civilian casualties resulting in a major exodus from much of the northern region. The distribution of food and medicine has become increasingly difficult. The civilian population is suffering from hunger and starvation and from a virtual absence of medical services.

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Mr. Clark urged the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that food and medicine are delivered to the north for distribution by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). He called on the LTTE not to hinder these humanitarian efforts to safeguard the welfare of civilians.

"We are witnessing a very serious situation in humanitarian terms in northern Sri Lanka. Every effort must be made to ensure that innocent civilians in the north do not become victims of the current conflict."

Mr. Clark called on both sides in the conflict to return to negotiations as the most appropriate means to resolve the dispute and to ensure the safety of civilians in the north and east. Canada, along with the European Community and Nordic countries, and the United States and Australia, made a *démarche* to the Sri Lankan delegation at the Consultative Group meeting on Development Assistance chaired by the World Bank in Paris on October 25.

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