

Opening Statement on Recent Developments in Sri Lanka

Senator Richard G. Lugar

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I thank Senator Casey for chairing this hearing on recent developments in Sri Lanka. After more than twenty-five years of conflict and tens of thousands of lives lost, the fight between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the LTTE) and the government has intensified to a new level of violence. Earlier this month, Senator Kerry and I jointly expressed concerns about the deteriorating

humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. Some Sri Lankans trapped by the fighting in the northern part of the island are being denied freedom of movement, access to international food aid, and medical assistance.

Another casualty of the fighting has been press freedom. The Economist magazine reports: “Journalists have no access to the battlefield or to the displaced and must depend on information released by the

government or the Tigers.” Media personnel are being threatened and physically attacked. Press freedoms are an essential element of democracy. It is in every nation’s best interest to have an independent press that is free to investigate issues and stories.

Senator Kerry and I urged the Government of Sri Lanka to protect all of its citizens, facilitate humanitarian access, and conduct swift and credible investigations into

attacks on journalists and other civilians.

The United States has repeatedly asserted that a lasting, sustainable peace can best be achieved if the Sri Lankan Government works now to reach a political solution that addresses the aspirations of all Sri Lankans, including Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims.

I look forward to the insights of our witnesses.

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