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Accountability in Sri Lanka for Lasting Peace

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OF CALIFORNIA

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Mister Speaker, I rise today to express my concerns about the current reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka and my hope for a lasting peace for all of its people. This past May marked the second anniversary of the end to the Sri Lankan civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government forces. This tragic war lasted a quarter century and undoubtedly weighed heavily on all Sri Lankans, including an entire generation of young adults that has only known war until two years ago. Peace was achieved, but for how long?

In order to help achieve a lasting peace, the burdens of the civil war must be lifted and the root causes of the conflict must be addressed. For these reasons, I commend the government of Sri Lanka for making commitments to address the needs of all ethnic groups. It has also recognized that a political settlement and reconciliation among all ethnic groups is necessary for any chance of a peaceful and just society. The Sri Lankan government's inquiry, Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), was created as a primary mechanism for the reconciliation process as it investigates allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both opposing forces during the civil war. The LLRC will not

succeed, however, if it fails to gain the trust of the people for which it is trying to provide justice. Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have criticized the LLRC for failing to provide any accountability for atrocities that are alleged to have taken place. Further, the recently released United Nations' *Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka* determined that the allegations are credible and recommends an independent international mechanism to investigate these allegations and provide accountability.

I have faith in the government of Sri Lanka to provide for the peaceful wellbeing of all its people. To achieve this noble goal, however, the Sri Lankan people must also have faith in their government and fellow citizens. Too many questions remain unanswered. Too many suspicions can reseed conflict. I appeal to the government of Sri Lanka to follow its commitments to addressing the needs of all ethnic groups and embrace the recommendations of the UN report. Only a trusted accountability mechanism will relieve the tensions of distrust hardened by war and lay a clean foundation for sustainable peace for Sri Lanka and all its people.