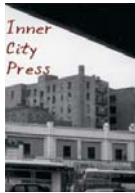


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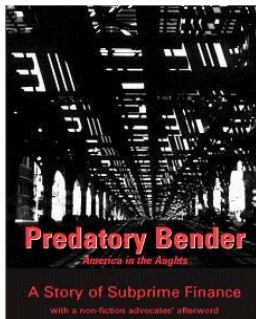
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With UN's Holmes in Sri Lanka, Government Supported, Staff Scared, Deaths Uncommented On

Byline: Matthew Russell Lee of Inner City Press at the UN: *News Analysis*

UNITED NATIONS, February 19 -- With UN humanitarian chief John Holmes traveling in Sri Lanka with the government, the UN in New York on Thursday declined to answer questions about who it would consult to confirm the level of civilian deaths there this year -- approximately [2000, Inner City Press is told](#) -- and even who Holmes would meet with, in the conflict zone or "on the other side of the conflict." Video [here](#), from Minute 11:39.

Rather, UN spokesperson Michele Montas said, the questions should "wait for Mr. Holmes to return." Whether that means he will finally provide a UN estimate of civilian casualties when he returns is not known. Some compare his trip to those of Ibrahim Gambari to Myanmar, trips largely seen as backing up the government. Gambari has yet to speak publicly about his trip, weeks ago, to Myanmar. The UN has a way of trying to silence mounting questions by sending an envoy, followed by silence.

Before he left, Inner City Press asked Holmes if his Office has an estimate of civilian casualties in the Sri Lanka's conflict, and how these compare to those in Gaza, which Holmes visited. Holmes said there is not enough access to estimate casualties, and that it is not productive to make comparisons like that. Video [here](#).

A senior UN official, speaking to Inner City Press Thursday on condition of anonymity, threw the blame for the UN's inaction on Sri Lanka on the shoulders of India. "They do not want to

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internationalize the situation in Sri Lanka," this official said, citing again the Tamil Tigers' role in the killing of Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. He also explained Ban Ki-moon's failure to call for a ceasefire as a product of his style, as "a former bilateral diplomat" as opposed to other, more public roles.



UN's Ban and Holmes, civilian casualty count and ceasefire call in Sri Lanka not shown

Other UN officials have suggested that Ban's silence may mirror his native South Korea's foreign policy. Even among Ban's ranks, the questions are growing.

While Holmes in Sri Lanka says he is visiting the UN country team, this arrives to Inner City Press in New York:

□

Subj: Sri Lanka
From: [Anonymity granted and to be defended]
To: Inner City Press
Sent: 2/19/2009

International staff are worried about losing their visas and their jobs if they speak out. Local staff are worried about being put in jail. I know of at least two Tamil UN staff who were put in jail in 2008. And I know of many NGO, UN staff and journalists who have lost their visas or been thrown out of the country for saying the wrong thing. Who is going to speak out under these circumstances, particularly if you are not sure if your agency is going to back you up?

Who indeed. Watch this site.

Click [here](#) for [Feb. 12 debate on Sri Lanka](#)
<http://bloggingheads.tv/diavlogs/17772?in=11:33&out=32:56>

Click [here](#) for [Inner City Press' Jan. 16, 2009 debate about Gaza](#)

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Click here from [Inner City Press' December 12 debate on UN double standards](#)

Click here for [Inner City Press' November 25 debate on Somalia, politics](#)

Click here for [Inner City Press Nov. 7 debate on the war in Congo](#)

Watch this site, and [this Oct. 2 debate, on UN, bailout, MDGs](#)

and this [October 17 debate, on Security Council and Obama and the UN](#).

* * *

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Click [here](#) for a [Reuters AlertNet](#) piece by this correspondent about Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army. Click [here](#) for an earlier [Reuters AlertNet](#) piece about the Somali National Reconciliation Congress, and the UN's \$200,000 contribution from an undefined trust fund. [Video Analysis here](#)

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