

Resolution Calling on the Sri Lankan Government and the International Community to Address the Human Rights and Humanitarian Needs of Sri Lanka's Tamils

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(House of Representatives - November 03, 2009)

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me express my appreciation to Chairman Berman for yielding time and also for the expeditious manner in which this measure has been handled.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 711, a bipartisan resolution calling on the Sri Lankan Government and the international community to address the human rights and humanitarian needs of Sri Lanka's Tamils. I urge all Members of the body to support it.

Mr. Speaker, May of 2009 marked the conclusion of the 26-year struggle between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan Government. As a result of this war, tens of thousands of Sri Lankan citizens have been displaced and are without homes.

The Sri Lankan Government believes that among their displaced citizens are former Liberation Tiger militants. As part of the vetting process, the Sri Lankan Government has set up make-shift camps to house over 280,000 internally displaced persons and allow the government to relocate these suspected militants. Allegations are being reported that the standard of treatment and the living conditions afforded to people in these camps is grossly inadequate.

Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Human Rights Council's 11th special session on Sri Lanka met on May 27, 2009, to address the internally displaced persons in government-run camps. During this session, the Sri Lankan Government made commitments to improve the conditions for the people housed in these camps and stated that the bulk of the people would be resettled within 180 days. After the first 150 days passing with no progress, the Sri Lankan Government has just released some 50,000 people, which is a good first step; although nearly 230,000 internally displaced persons still remain held in camps.

So, Mr. Speaker, I support this resolution that calls on the Sri Lankan Government to release their citizens and allow them to return to their homes and properties. I, again, urge my colleagues to support the internally displaced persons in their quest for freedom.

Again, I would like to thank Chairman Berman for his expeditious handling of this matter. I urge its support.