



## Office of the President

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Cardinal Francis George, OMI  
Archbishop of Chicago

May 22, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, I thank you for your statement on May 13, in which you called for steps to ease the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. Now that the government of Sri Lanka has declared victory, the focus should be on helping and healing the many persons and communities who have been so brutally affected by this conflict.

The Church's unwavering commitment to protecting human life and dignity moves us to be profoundly concerned for the most vulnerable Sri Lankans. Since January 2009, the United Nations estimated over 6,400 people have been killed and 13,000 wounded. At least 300,000 people are currently confined in camps and in urgent need of shelter, food, water, and medical care.

We request that our nation join the international community in pressing the Government of Sri Lanka to allow international relief agencies access to these camps to provide humanitarian assistance and to ensure transparency in the processing and care of these internally displaced people. Many of these people have suffered both physical and psychological trauma and are uncertain about whether they can return home, what they will find if they do go home and how they will rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

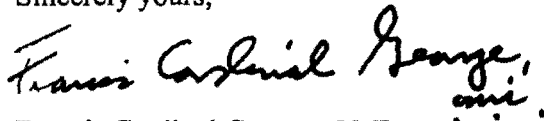
While the armed conflict may have ended, the difficult task of reconciliation remains. The underlying grievances of the Tamils and other minorities must be addressed in ways that promote equality and opportunity for all. The U.S. can play a role, in conjunction with the United Nations, in encouraging the Sri Lankan government to engage in a dialogue aimed at reconciliation and building a just and peaceful state.

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Archbishop Oswald Gomis, Archbishop of Colombo, called for recognition that Sri Lanka is “a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural community” and asked the government to find “a political formula that will inspire confidence and promote a sense of belonging among the minority groups in the country.” That is a worthy goal that our Conference of Bishops hopes the United States will support.

Thank you for your consideration of the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of Sri Lanka.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis Cardinal George, OMI". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'F' and a distinct 'omi.' at the end.

Francis Cardinal George, OMI  
Archbishop of Chicago  
President