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From the Secretary of State

2 December 2009

Lord Hannay of Chiswick
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

Thank you for your letter of 12 November about the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the recent conflict in Sri Lanka.

Since the end of the conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) the UK has remained actively engaged in working for an improvement in the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka and for long-term reconciliation between Sri Lanka's communities.

Our most immediate priority has been to urge the government to return the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to their home areas as soon as it is safe to do so. The UK has repeatedly called for civilians to be freed and allowed the choice to return home. The announcement that IDPs will be granted freedom of movement as of 1 December is a positive step. We believe the opening of the camps and granting real freedom of movement will allow the thousands still living in the camps to start to rebuild their lives. It is now imperative that humanitarian agencies be allowed full access to the IDPs to give them the help they need in all the places that they return to. The UK has been supporting the international humanitarian agencies and NGOs so that they have been able to provide much needed assistance to the IDPs. Since September 2008 the UK has allocated £12.5 million for this purpose. The UK will continue to clear landmines, provide transport from the camps and help restart their lives so people can return home quickly and safely.

The question of whether Sri Lanka should continue to benefit from the EU's preferential trade scheme (GSP+) goes wider than the immediate humanitarian situation. In return for receiving GSP+ beneficiary countries are expected to fully implement 27 UN human rights-related conventions. In October 2008 the Commission took the decision to launch an investigation into Sri Lanka's implementation of three core conventions: the ICCPR, the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The investigation concluded that none of these conventions, nor the legislation incorporating the obligations under these conventions, had been effectively implemented by Sri Lanka. In addition



to restrictions on the freedom of movement for IDPs, the investigation highlighted widespread unlawful killings, torture and disappearances attributable to state agents and the imposition of Emergency Powers that permit the authorities to carry out arbitrary detentions without the right of appeal. We are very clear that, in order to retain its trade preferences, Sri Lanka must respect the international human rights obligations it undertook to implement when it first signed up to GSP+. We have urged the Government of Sri Lanka to take immediate action to address the issues outlined in this report. The EU will remain in dialogue with the Government of Sri Lanka on the steps necessary to address the areas of concern highlighted in their report of the investigation.

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DAVID MILIBAND