

# NO FIRE ZONE

*"It is vitally important that this feature reaches the widest possible audience"* Empire

*"Dark & disturbing... a hair-raising documentary"* The Hindustan Times

*"A Tour de Force by Nobel Prize nominee Macrae"* Movies that Matter

*"I can confidently say that No Fire Zone ... is the most devastating film I have seen"* Wendy Bacon,  
Hoopla, Australia

*"Haunting, disturbing...unforgettable... not since John Pilger's 1979 Year Zero has there been a  
documentary as important"* Right Now, Australia

*"An utterly convincing documentary"* Globe and Mail, Toronto

*"Will break your heart... incredibly graphic and very hard to watch, but that's the best way to get  
people to act"* Toronto Film Scene

*"Devastating... shocking"* The Deccan Herald

*"Images sufficiently graphic to give you nightmares – but sometimes it takes a nightmare to wake  
us up"* Now Magazine, Canada

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## **NO FIRE ZONE: THE KILLING FIELDS OF SRI LANKA**

*“They (The Sri Lankan Government) did do what they intended to do all the way through which was to finish the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) off militarily, no matter what it cost, including civilian lives. They didn’t believe that anybody in the international community was prepared to stop them – and they were right... The idea of responsibility to protect was a nice notion but it wasn’t going to be actually used in this particular case.”*

**Sir John Holmes, former UN Head of Humanitarian Affairs**

### **Introduction**

**No Fire Zone** represents the culmination of three years of journalistic investigation and contains deeply disturbing new evidence, powerful eye-witness testimony and compelling personal stories of survival in a war zone. The film is expected to renew international controversy over the issue of accountability in Sri Lanka ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) which will be hosted by the Sri Lankan government in Colombo in November this year. It is a devastating indictment of the men responsible for the crimes and an exposé of the failure of the international community to prevent this catastrophe.

Carefully evidenced and powerfully measured, the film uses eyewitness accounts, expert opinion, and translated mobile phone and camera footage from both the victims and the perpetrators of violence. This footage enables the filmmakers, in a way almost never done before, to piece together the day-to-day horror of this war. Viscerally powerful actuality from the battlefield, from inside the crudely dug civilian bunkers and from over-crowded makeshift hospitals, records evidence of war crimes, summary execution, torture and sexual violence. The film also addresses the culpability of the Tamil Tigers, themselves responsible for committing war crimes and for preventing civilians from trying to escape the carnage.

Since 2009 there has been no independent judicial investigation into what happened and the Government of Sri Lanka continues to say the video evidence of war crimes is faked.

A UN Panel of Experts reported to Ban Ki Moon that as many as 40,000 civilians may have died during the first few months of 2009 – mostly as a result of government shelling. A more recent internal UN review concluded the figure could be higher - 70,000 or even more.

**No Fire Zone** also brings the story up to date. This is still a live story – the brutal repression and ethnic restructuring of the Tamil homelands in the north of Sri Lanka continues – journalists and government critics are still disappearing.

Director Callum Macrae said: “This film isn’t an academic exercise in historical accountability. The men responsible for these crimes are still in charge. They are going to extraordinary lengths to deny those crimes ever happened. They are continuing to brutally repress Tamils in the north and persecute anyone who criticises the government including their own judiciary.

“If there is no attempt to address these issues and to bring justice to those who suffered, then history is destined to repeat itself with yet more bloodshed. We hope our film will be part of that process of truth-telling.”

“The Sri Lankan government clearly hope that CHOGM will be seen as the moment the responsibility for these crimes is forgotten – others hope it will become the focus of a renewed campaign for an independent international inquiry into all the crimes committed at the end of the war.” said Macrae.

The project is backed by Channel 4, BRITDOC, The Bertha Foundation, the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, Stichting Democratie en Media, and WorldView as well as NGOs including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

## **Background**

No Fire Zone is the culmination of a three-year investigation which has included two award-winning TV documentaries broadcast on Channel 4 – Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields (first screened in June 2011) and Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished (first screened in March 2012). The films themselves were built on the pioneering work of Channel 4 News which led the way in telling the world of the crimes committed at the end of the war. The film combines footage from the first two documentaries with new, damning evidence, eyewitness account and expert opinion.

The first two documentaries had a significant global impact and were aired in parliaments worldwide and the UN. According to the UN Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields ‘was particularly powerful in informing Member States of the violations reported to have taken place.’ The team behind the films were nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2012.

## **Production Biographies**

### **Callum Macrae – Director**

BAFTA-nominated director Callum Macrae has been making films for 20 years in the UK and around the world, including Iraq, Japan, Haiti and several in Africa – covering wars and conflicts in Cote D’Ivoire, Uganda, Mali and Sudan. His films have ranged from observational documentaries to current affairs investigations including three major investigations into allegations of coalition crimes in Iraq.

His most recent major projects were the two TV documentaries on the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka and a film made in South Kordofan of Sudan, recording Khartoum’s war of terror on the Nuba people.

His awards include two Royal Television Society awards, two One World awards, an Indie award, an Amnesty award and - in the US - the Columbia DuPont Broadcast journalism award for his work in Japan after the Tsunami, and most recently a prestigious Peabody Award. This year he was named as number two in Broadcast’s 100 Hottest Directors list and awarded a Scottish BAFTA Special Achievement Award. As a writer on the Observer he won the Bank of Scotland Campaigning Journalist of the Year Award.

### **Zoe Sale - Producer**

Zoe Sale is an award-winning journalist and filmmaker. She worked on both previous UK TV documentaries about Sri Lanka. For the last twelve years she has been making current affairs and factual programming for the BBC, ITV, ITN, C4, C5 and National Geographic. Before training as a journalist she worked as a political researcher and environmental lobbyist.

### **Michael Nollet – Editor**

Michael began his career assisting in the cutting rooms of Michael Winterbottom (24-Hour Party People), Andrea Arnold (Red Road, Fish Tank) and Ridley Scott (Kingdom of Heaven).

His work editing feature-length documentary includes "100 Doors" (Nominated for Best Feature Documentary, British Independent Film Awards), "Moving to Mars" (Worldwide Version), "9/11: Phone Calls from the Towers" (Darlow Smithson Productions) and "Windscale: A Nuclear Disaster" (BBC).

## **Eyewitnesses**

### **Vany Viji – Tamil civilian**

A young British Tamil whose family escaped the violence Sri Lanka in 1994 when she was just nine years old. The family settled in London where Vany went to school and later studied biomedical science at university. After her marriage broke down, she decided to return to Sri Lanka for the first time since her childhood. She was visiting relatives in northern Sri Lanka when the siege began, and became trapped along with hundreds of thousands of other men, women and children, desperately fleeing the government onslaught. In the final weeks of the war she worked as a volunteer in two makeshift hospitals which were set up in abandoned schools within the "safe zones". After the war – along with some 300,000 other "rescued hostages" - she was held in government internment camps for three months before eventually making it back to the UK.

### **Benjamin Dix – former UN worker**

Dix was the communications officer for the UN in Kilinochchi in the LTTE held north of Sri Lanka. He was reluctantly compelled to evacuate the area by the UN after the government declared that it could "no longer guarantee their safety". He provides a personal account of the UN leaving, and in his opinion, abandoning hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians to the mercy of the Sri Lankan military onslaught. He describes the pleas from ordinary people not to desert them as they knew that, without international witness, the Sri Lankan government forces would remove the LTTE by any means and at any cost. Dix – who has a masters degree in Anthropology of Conflict and Violence - is now writing a graphic novel about the Sri Lankan civil war in collaboration with artist Lindsay Pollock.

### **Sir John Holmes - Former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs**

Former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, January 2007 to August 2010 and current Director of The Ditchley Foundation and member of the International Rescue Committee's Board of Trustees. In 1998 he was awarded a knighthood for the role he played in the Northern Ireland peace process. He candidly admits that the Sri Lankan government was willing to do whatever it took to achieve their goals, and that the international community would turn a blind eye

### **Peter Mckay – Former staffer UNOPS**

Mckay worked for UNOPS (the technical arm of the UN). He was evacuated from Kilinochchi with the other UN international staff including Benjamin Dix in 2008. Later, after leading the last UN food convoy into the war zone, he became trapped for two weeks. During this period he witnessed at first hand government shelling of the no fire zone and speaks about it publicly for the first time in the film.

Mackay was expelled from Sri Lanka by the Sri Lankan government after refuting the official government position – what he describes as “wartime propaganda” - used during the final battles of the civil war.

### **David Miliband – Former Foreign Secretary, UK**

Secretary of State and Commonwealth Affairs at the time, David Miliband visited Sri Lanka during the last stages of the civil war in 2009. He voiced his concerns over human right violations and war crimes, and encouraged the Sri Lankan government to call a ceasefire with the LTTE. In cables to the US embassy outlined in No Fire Zone, Miliband calls Sri Lankan government officials “liars” when they claim they are not committing war crimes.

### **Quotes**

“There was a propaganda battle clearly taking place in which it was important for the Rajapaksa Government to insist on the whiter than white nature of its own approach in order to get through this final phase – the final weeks or ultimately days of the war...” **David Miliband**

“They (the Sri Lankan government) did do what they intended to do all the way through which was to finish the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) off militarily, no matter what it cost, including civilian lives. They didn’t believe that anybody in the international community was prepared to stop them – and they were right... The idea of responsibility to protect was a nice notion but it wasn’t going to be actually used in this particular case.” **Sir John Holmes, former UN Head of Humanitarian Affairs**

“I was in this vehicle that symbolised protection you know it had UN written on the side, it had radios, it had blast proof windows and I was in this blast proof jacket looking at friends of mine on the side of the road wearing a Sari and rubber flip flops” **Benjamin Dix, former UN worker**

“There’s a crucial point to be made about why the Sri Lanka government declared the no fire zone within the effective range of all of the weaponry being used by the Sri Lankan military to fire in that direction. There is only one intent and that is because you don't really care you are going to kill the people that are located in that safe zone or more importantly you are actively targeting them.” **Peter Mckay, Former UN staffer.**

“Actually we have come back to the square one at the end of the war and the Tamils are living just like the way they used to do before the war started - with the same kind of injustices but increased militarisation and increased state sponsored colonisation scheme.” **Bashana Abeywardene. Exiled Sinhalese journalist. Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka.**