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Failure to Follow Up Would Be Shameful September 13, 2011

(Geneva) – The United Nations Human Rights Council should act on the recommendations in a report commissioned by the UN Secretary-General detailing grave abuses during the final months of Sri Lanka’s armed conflict, Human Rights Watch said today. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent the report to the council on September 12, 2011. Ban has said that he would welcome a mandate to establish an international investigation mechanism, the main recommendation of his Panel of Experts report.

In May 2010, Ban commissioned a three-member Panel of Experts to advise him on accountability in Sri Lanka after President Mahinda Rajapaksa failed to investigate alleged laws-of-war violations during the conflict, which ended in 2009. The panel's report, published on April 25, concluded that government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) conducted military operations “with flagrant disregard for the protection, rights, welfare and lives of civilians and failed to respect the norms of international law.” The report also said that tens of thousands of civilians might have been killed during the last five months of the war, the majority by government shelling.

“When a UN Panel of Experts report concludes up to 40,000 civilians died amid war crimes, the Human Rights Council should feel compelled to act,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The council should order a full international investigation – anything less would be a shameful abdication of responsibility.”

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