

4.17

Sri Lanka

Widespread violence between the Tamil Tigers and the government of Sri Lanka during 2006 cast into doubt the continued viability of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), which had been established to oversee the 2002 cease-fire between the two parties. Following the election of hard-line anti-Tamil president Mahinda Rajapakse in November 2005, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) ramped up guerrilla attacks on government military elements. The government responded with aerial and artillery shelling for the first time since the original cease-fire. The conflict became more

violent as the year progressed, and brought the Norwegian-mediated peace talks to a halt by June. In the same month, the LTTE demanded that all SLMM monitors from European Union countries withdraw, which they did by the end of August. With limited capacity, the SLMM was relegated to observing what began to look like renewed and all-out war.

Following decades of civil war between the government and the LTTE—a struggle over Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic identity and autonomy in the north—a tentative cease-fire between the two sides was formalized in a



REUTERS/Ahmedhuda Lokuhapuarachchi

A soldier patrols past a Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) jeep near the village of Salampan-Kalmadu, Vavuniya, northern Sri Lanka, 11 May 2006.

memorandum of understanding in February 2002. The SLMM, composed of monitors from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, was established to oversee the cessation of military operations, separation of forces, and the free movement of personnel and nonmilitary goods. The mission, headquartered in Colombo, maintains six district offices and a liaison office in Killinochchi, and points of contact in the north and east. District offices operate mobile units and patrol in their areas of responsibility. The SLMM has the authority to respond to complaints throughout Sri Lanka, but must rely on the parties to provide access and information, as well as security.

The dramatic escalation of conflict in 2006 overwhelmed the SLMM's limited investigative capacity. In June, the SLMM reported that only a small portion of the cease-fire violations were being investigated and ruled on. As the security situation deteriorated even further, an atmosphere of lawlessness became pervasive, as exemplified by the August murder of seventeen staff members of the French nongovernmental organization Action Contre la Faim.

In May, the EU placed the LTTE on its list of international terrorist organizations, prompting the Tigers to demand the withdrawal of EU country monitors—citing lack of impartiality. By the end of August 2006, the Swedish, Finnish, and Danish contingents had departed; in replacement were ten Norwegian and Icelandic monitors, which brought the mission's

Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM)

• Authorization date	22 February 2002
• Start date	February 2002
• Head of mission	Major-General Lars Johan Sjølvberg (Norway)
• Budget	\$2.4 million (October 2005–September 2006)
• Strength as of 30 September 2006	Military observers: 30

strength back to thirty, still less than the original strength of sixty.

Despite repeated assertions by both LTTE and the government that the cease-fire was still in effect, hundreds of combatants and civilians were killed from July to November 2006. Amid the fighting, the LTTE agreed to attend Norwegian-mediated talks in Geneva on 28–29 October. The October talks devolved into little more than an opportunity for the parties to trade accusations. What followed was a steady escalation of violence by both sides including aerial assaults on LTTE installations, the assassination of pro-Tamil members of the Sri Lankan government, a suicide attack on the brother of the president, and increasingly brazen guerrilla attacks by the LTTE in the last months of 2006. The prospects of the SLMM having a significant impact in this bleak environment is discouraging.