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UN Human Rights Commissioner Zeid Hussein has just wrapped up a four day visit to Sri Lanka. During the course of his visit Hussein reportedly held discussions a wide range of people. The photos below highlight a couple constituencies he met with that particularly interest me. The first, two of the country's most respected Buddhist leaders, Chief Prelates of the Malwathu and Asgiri Chapters, the Most Venerable Sumangala and Aththadassi Thera.





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he second a group of Tamil civilians, who Hussein met at a welfare centre situated inside one of the numerous IDP camps that still pockmark the north of the country. Hussein's message to them: I hope to see you living back in your own lands next time I visit. The face of the women below suggests that almost seven years after the war's end, belief that this will actually happen someday soon sits more on the UN Commissioner's side than hers.

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in concluded the visit with a press conference at which he delivered a lengthy, rousing and generally excellent [statement](#). The report below gives a flavour of the overall message. One paragraph, however, particularly caught my attention. I think it offers real insight into both the challenges confronting Sri Lanka for genuine healing of the wounds of its decades-long conflict: and prospective solutions. Here it is:

“If mistakes are made, or significant problems are downplayed or ignored during the first few years, they become progressively harder to sort out as time goes on. While the glass is still molten, if you are quick and skilful, you can shape it into a fine object that will last for years. Once it starts to harden in misshapen form, it becomes more and more difficult to rectify. Likewise if any of the four key elements of post conflict resolution – truth-telling, accountability, reparations and institutional reform – are neglected or mishandled, unresolved resentments will fester, new strains will emerge, and a tremendous opportunity to establish long-term stability, which in turn should result in greater prosperity, will be lost.”

Here's the news report:

## **Zeid warns of threat from extremists to Lanka's recovery**

Extreme nationalistic tendencies lay at the heart of Sri Lanka's conflict, and they should not be allowed to undermine the country's long term chances of recovery once again, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said today.

Addressing the media in Colombo at the end of his visit to Sri Lanka, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein noted that a year ago, large numbers of Sri Lankans voted for change, for reconciliation, for truth, for justice and it would be a great shame if a minority of extreme voices – on both sides – who are bent on disruption, were allowed to prevail by creating fear where there should be hope.

“Sri Lanka needs a serious debate about these very serious issues, on which its future depends. This needs to start with a thorough, frank and honest discussion of the detailed findings of the September 2015 UN report, as it is important that all Sri Lankans rally behind the process and better understand the point of view of all the victims on all sides,” he said.

He also said that repairing the damage done by a protracted conflict is a task of enormous complexity, and the early years are crucial.

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glass is still molten, if you are quick and skilful, you can shape it into a fine object that will last for years. Once it starts to harden in misshapen form, it becomes more and more difficult to rectify. Likewise if any of the four key elements of post conflict resolution – truth-telling, accountability, reparations and institutional reform – are neglected or mishandled, unresolved resentments will fester, new strains will emerge, and a tremendous opportunity to establish long-term stability, which in turn should result in greater prosperity, will be lost,” he said.

He said that his visit has been a much more friendly, cooperative and encouraging visit than the one his predecessor endured in August 2013, which was marred by vituperative attacks on her integrity, simply because she addressed a number of burning human rights issues that any High Commissioner for Human Rights would have raised at that time.

He also said that the number of torture complaints has been reduced but new cases continue to emerge – as two recent reports, detailing some disturbing alleged cases that occurred in 2015, have shown – and police all too often continue to resort to violence and excessive force.

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