

Sri Lanka churches unite in peace call: Civil war has returned

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Church groups in Sri Lanka have made a united call for a political solution to the ethnic conflict that has claimed more than 6,000 lives in the past two years.

“Fighting will not lead us anywhere,” W. P. Ebenezer Joseph, president of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, said December 17 from Colombo.

In recent months, Sri Lanka has slipped back into civil war between security forces and Tamil rebels—mainly Hindu—seeking autonomy from the mainly Buddhist Sinhalese majority. Although a 2002 ceasefire put in place by Norwegian mediators ended two decades of conflict, fighting flared again after the election of President Mahinda Rajapakse in November 2005. Rajapakse won with the support of Sinhala nationalist parties.

Nearly 1 million people in the north and east of Sri Lanka were displaced and 70,000 killed in two decades of civil war as resistance forces sought autonomy for ethnic Tamil majority areas prior to the 2002 ceasefire.

“The war and violence in Sri Lanka has escalated to a fearful level surpassing all standards of civility,” lamented the December 12 statement by major church groups on the Indian Ocean island. *-Ecumenical News International*