Holding the Sri Lankan government accountable for war crimes during a hidden war.
No Fire Zone tells the story of the final 138 days of the 26-year Sri Lankan civil war, a brutal offensive which saw between 40,000 and 70,000 civilians die. Through powerful personal stories, eyewitness testimony and video evidence this film shows how thousands of civilians were told to gather in what the government promised would be a no fire zone and were then systematically shelled and deliberately denied adequate food and medicines.

With direct evidence of war crimes, summary execution, torture and sexual violence recorded by both victims and perpetrators on mobile phones and small cameras, this is not just a film of record but also a call to action.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

“A difficult enraging watch... Tragically it’s essential viewing” — Time Out UK
CONTEXT
In 2009 the government of Sri Lanka conducted the last few months of their civil war against the Tamil Tigers in virtual secrecy: the UN and international media were excluded and local press intimidated into silence. The perceived peace in Sri Lanka had cost as many as 40–70,000 civilian deaths, a massacre that was virtually unknown around the world; the overarching aim of the campaign was therefore to bring worldwide attention to the war crimes and crimes against humanity that had been committed.

IMPACT DYNAMICS
As a tool for analysing campaign strategies, BRITDOC has devised what we call the Four Impact Dynamics; broad categories for the kinds of change you can make in the world. This has been developed by studying the films that we have worked with as well as working with NGOs and activists to understand how they conceptualise their work. More information on the impact dynamics can be found in impactguide.org
Below we apply the impact dynamics to the campaign goals of No Fire Zone.

CHANGING BEHAVIOURS
Actively mobilising people to do different not just think different, whether that’s to buy or boycott, donate or volunteer.

CHANGING MINDS
Mass awareness and understanding – creating a shift in public attitudes.
Put the call for justice at the heart of the international agenda.
Emphasise the present-day relevance of what happened in 2009 by shining a light on ongoing human rights abuses, carried out under cover of a perception around the world that the end of the war had brought peace and reconciliation to Sri Lanka.
Target audience:
International civil society, lawmakers.

CHANGING STRUCTURES
Top down change – whether in politics or business, directly influencing law and policy to change the context.
Get the UN Human Rights Council to vote for an independent international inquiry into the crimes at the end of the war and ongoing human rights abuses in Sri Lanka.
Target audience:
Diplomats of member countries of UNHRC.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES
Grassroots organising – providing the focal point around which people come together.

No Fire Zone
The campaign strategy was driven by high level influencer screenings organised in conjunction with civil society partners; the team worked closely with national and international partners including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group and many Tamil organisations.

The team decided to launch the campaign in 19 countries. The overall strategy was to maximise impact in Asian, African and Latin American countries, while focusing on key influential western countries, to maximise pressure on key member country and key embassies and High Commissions throughout the campaign.

HOW THE CAMPAIGN WORKED

The campaign strategy was driven by high level influencer screenings organised in conjunction with civil society partners; the team worked closely with national and international partners including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group and many Tamil organisations.

These screenings were organised into short tours of key regions ahead of political votes and events, often including parliamentary screenings. There were multiple screenings in 27 countries over five continents, with civil society partners; the team worked closely with civil society partners, the team worked closely with influential western countries, to maximise pressure on key member country and key embassies and High Commissions throughout the campaign.

In a strategy that was to be repeated throughout the campaign, the team broke a dramatic news story in this case releasing photographs of Balachandran, the 12-year-old son of Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, who was pictured alive and in captivity prior to his execution. Macrae wrote an op-ed in The Hindu newspaper and it later ran the story on the front page. It created a political storm and dominated the news agenda in India for the next few days as well as creating a wave of international press coverage.

The campaign also wanted to generate controversy, key to sustaining pressure on politicians. Leading up to the UN Human Rights Council vote in March 2014, Macrae screened a specially created 10-minute short from the film highlighting sexual violence. This was shown at three separate fringe meetings attended by many national missions, and he spoke at all three. Macrae also made a short film from extracts of the film and it later ran the story on the front page. It created a political storm and dominated the news agenda in India for the next few days as well as creating a wave of international press coverage.

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Advocacy at the UN

A month later, in March 2013, No Fire Zone premiered at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, hosted by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. This was effectively the launch of the campaign for an international inquiry. All 47 countries on the UN Human Rights Council were targeted as they would vote on any resolution on human rights and accountability of Sri Lanka, the team sent letters to the national missions of every member country and key embassies as well as their embassies and High Commissions.

In London, the team also set up a number of private screenings and meetings at embassies ranging from Venezuela to Sierra Leone.

The campaign also wanted to maximise pressure on key influential western countries including the UK, US, Canada and Australia and the countries of the European Union; high profile screenings were held in parliaments from Australia to Malaysia, from the UK to Capitol Hill, and from the UN to the European parliament. Macrae was the use of the film and its revelations to generate media coverage beyond the usual film reviews.

In most cases the team worked closely with local NGOs. The seven-country tour of Australia and New Zealand included a screening at the Australian Parliament which was sponsored by 15 separate NGOs. These included the Human Rights Law Centre, the Australian Tamil Congress, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Maritime Union of Australia important because of the contentious issue of many Tamil asylum seekers arriving by boat.

The Global Tamil Forum organised a meeting in the House of Commons where Macrae spoke from the platform in the UK, along with Labour leader Ed Miliband, Baroness Warsi of the Conservatives and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg who paid tribute to the film, saying it left him “reeling” as well as “shocked, distressed and moved”.

Generating press and controversy, and continuing to provide new revelations to the press, was the key to sustaining pressure on politicians. Leading up to the UN Human Rights Council vote in March 2014, Macrae screened a specially created 10-minute short from the film highlighting sexual violence. This was shown at three separate fringe meetings attended by many national missions, and he spoke at all three. Macrae also made a short film from extracts of the film and it later ran the story on the front page. It created a political storm and dominated the news agenda in India for the next few days as well as creating a wave of international press coverage.

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Other Campaigns

As well as lobbying the UN, specific campaigns were also built around significant events, such as the build up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Sri Lanka in November 2013 and the “Defy the Ban” campaign.

CAMPAIGN LAUNCH IN INDIA

The team decided to launch the UN Human Rights Council campaign in India; India’s vote was judged to be most critical, as it would influence others particularly in the Global South. In February 2013, a month before the film’s premiere at the UN Palais des Nations, the team released extracts from the film and mounted a major Indian publicity initiative.

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DEFY THE BAN

This campaign was mounted in response to a screening in Malaysia in July 2013 which was raided by 40 censorship board officials and the police on the instigation of the Sri Lankan government. The campaign in defence of the
organisers, one of whom now faces a maximum of three years in jail, significantly raised the profile of the issue and of censorship in general. In Nepal a similar attempt to ban the film led to protest screenings and public debate.

**COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING**

CHOGM was seen as a crucial focus for the campaign. For the Sri Lankan government this marked their return to the international diplomatic fold after the successful closing out of the civil war. Initially devised as a boycott campaign, the team responded to diplomatic events on the ground to create significant impact.

Again, Macrae broke a news story in the run up, about the capture and subsequent execution of the Tiger TV presenter Isaipriya which led to widespread demonstrations in Tamil Nadu.

**MASS AWARENESS**

In India the campaign was able to capitalise on a letter from the Indian board of film certification which had refused the film a theatrical release certificate, specifically stating as one of the justifications, that it may “strain friendly relations with Sri Lanka.” A free download in English and Hindi was the campaign response. As well as India, free streaming of the film in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Nepal provided an effective response to censorship bids and was intended to bring the film to the general public to create sustained pressure on politicians. The film received 30,000 hits in the two days after free streaming went live.

A collaboration with Channel 4 produced an innovative free app based on the film; it allows anyone to download the entire film and access and interact with content including news reports, United Nations and Red Cross reports and analysis of the atrocities; a timeline from 1956 to the present day; biographies, location maps; video from key contributors and filmmakers; and live links to the latest opinions, online content and further reading.

The team also produced a special Prezi presentation comprising a five-minute introduction to the film and the background to the story: bit.ly/SriLankaPrezi

“IT IS HARD TO THINK OF ANY FILM TEAM WHO SINGULARLY HAS HAD SUCH AN IMPACT ON MAJOR ISSUES OF WAR AND PEACE”

— Erik Solheim
Chief Negotiator, Sri Lankan peace process 2000–2005
CAMPAIGN IMPACT
The strategy of using media publicity to drive the campaign achieved its first success in India during the campaign launch in February 2013. Screenings, media and advocacy campaigns constantly made the front pages and prime-time television – over 150 major news stories and dozens of interviews over the week following the launch, not just in India but internationally. India’s refusal to grant Callum a visa further increased visibility and was condemned in an editorial in the Times of India.

Politically, the DMK party (the main opposition party in Tamil Nadu) withdrew from the Indian governing coalition led by Congress in protest as a result of the Balachandran revelations. This political storm was credited with guaranteeing the Indian government’s support of the resolution when it was voted on at UNHRC in March 2013. The eventual wording of the resolution – although watered down from its strongest draft – was seen by informed observers as stronger than anything that had been expected a few weeks before.

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING

Following the campaign’s revelations that Tiger TV presenter Isaipriya had been captured and executed, many Indian politicians called for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to boycott CHOGM in protest. The event had a high impact: he publicly cited it on at least 4 occasions. In November 2013 he issued a statement: “No Fire Zone... raises very serious questions that the Sri Lankan government must answer about what it did to protect innocent civilians. Questions that strengthen the case for an independent investigation. Questions that need answers if Sri Lanka is to build the truly peaceful and inclusive future its people deserve.”

While the intention had been to force Cameron to boycott the event, his subsequent attendance was exploited by the campaign and was widely covered in the press. He became the first foreign leader to visit Tamil homelands since independence in 1948. Significantly, he also called for a credible international investigation.

The Malaysian parliamentary screening led directly to the formation of a parliamentary group of Malaysian MPs to raise the issue of Sri Lankan war crimes and call for a change of government policy in support of an international inquiry.

An unexpected measure of the impact of the film was a major and well-financed campaign against the film team by Sri Lankan government supporters including a 222-page book to which Callum wrote a detailed 20,000-word rebuttal (described in a tweet by former Norwegian Foreign minister Erik Solheim as “the most impressive rebuttal I have ever read”).

CAMPAIGN IMPACT & ACHIEVEMENTS

One unplanned but notable effect was the fact that the film - and its international impact - seemed to restore hope to Tamils in the former war zones in Sri Lanka who were despairing of ever getting justice and believed the world had forgotten them.

M A Sumanthiran, the leading spokesman of The Tamil National Alliance (Sri Lanka’s main Tamil party) wrote: “The film No Fire Zone was like saline to a person dying of dehydration... The world was forgetting the cruel phase of this war and seemed to be getting on. No Fire Zone changed all of that. It tiugged at the conscience of the world, no one can now say it can carry on as before. And for those who had been through it personally, it was a vindication of their stories that no one was willing to listen to.”

GOAL ACHIEVED – MARCH 2014

The team achieved their campaign goal just one year after launch with the UN decision in March 2014 to set up an international inquiry into Sri Lankan war crimes. The vote was 23 countries for, 12 against and 12 abstentions (many of the abstentions were in reality ‘victories’ as they were persuaded not to oppose). This achievement involved nothing less than a volte face on the part of the UN Human Rights Council; after the war ended in 2009, the UNHRC had voted to congratulate Sri Lanka for its ‘success’ in defeating terrorism.
CAMPAIGN IMPACT & ACHIEVEMENTS

While this result was the combined effort of many organisations working together, there is acknowledgement that the film and the campaign played a critical role:

“No Fire Zone has achieved what no other has in opening a window on the final days of hell at the end of the Sri Lanka civil war... its impact on the international community is undisputed. I have no doubt that it is such evidence as this that led to the passing of the UNHRC resolution in March 2014 calling for an investigation into accountability at the end of the war and after, as the GoSL continues to wage the war by other means against the Tamil population.”
— International human rights lawyer Yasmin Sooka, formerly a leading member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa and author of its final report.

“Few films in recent years – few films ever, perhaps – have had such an extraordinary advocacy impact as the series of films on Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields culminating in No Fire Zone. No Fire Zone made the impossible seem possible, through dedication and commitment to the truth. I salute that achievement. This has changed the prospects for justice in Sri Lanka, and sent important signals for justice worldwide.”
— Steve Crawshaw; Director, Office of the Secretary General, Amnesty International.
After seeing the film, and one week before travelling to Sri Lanka for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, David Cameron tweeted:

@Number10gov Been watching @NoFireZoneMovie. Chilling documentary on Sri Lanka. Serious questions to put to @PresRajapaksa next week.

The inclusion of President Rajapaksa’s Twitter handle in the tweet meant the PM actually tweeted the message to Rajapaksa, a fact which generated further comment on social media.

The chief negotiator of the Sri Lankan peace process, former Norwegian Foreign Minister Erik Solheim tweeted in response:

@SolheimDAC What Cameron does in Sri Lanka is the litmus test. But he has started off well by watching @NoFireZone!

Other prominent tweets included that of Hugh Grant who said he was left “reeling” by No Fire Zone.

The Indian writer Meena Kandasamy has tweeted several times in support of the team.

The hashtag #NoFireZone has been used extensively and during the Channel 4 transmission it trended at no.1 in the UK. MPs, Australian senators, Indian politicians and writers have joined the conversation, as well as celebrities such as Bianca Jagger.

However, the internet has also been used by Sri Lankan government supporters in a sustained series of attacks. A Sri Lankan diplomat called Bandula Jayasakara, who was formerly President Rajapaksa’s media advisor, has issued dozens of tweets attacking Callum describing him as being in the pay of the Tamil Tigers and threatening to “make sure you don’t get a visa”. Other government supporters issued several death threats to Callum in advance of his attendance at CHOGM.

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY BY TWEET

The Indian writer Meena Kandasamy has tweeted several times in support of the team.

@meenakandasamy Callum Macrae stopped from going to the North through orchestrated mob. #NoFireZone #Commonwealth #CHOGM f.me/1KRjTQW8Q

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Sri Lanka gains independence from UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Black July marks start of civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Civil war ends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>UK broadcaster Channel 4 screens first of two news documentaries, Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Channel 4 screens follow up, War Crimes Unpunished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Completion of feature-length film bringing story up to date, No Fire Zone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Multiple screenings with diplomats, Letters and DVDs are sent to embassies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Commonwealth Tour of Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Global Tamil Forum hosts screening at House of Commons, UK.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Callum Macrae is a BAFTA and Grierson-nominated director and writer known for films on human rights and in defence of the disenfranchised. He’s won many awards including two Royal Television Society, two One World and an Amnesty award in the UK as well as the Columbia DuPont and Peabody Awards in the US. In 2013 he gained a Scottish BAFTA Special Achievement Award. For the past two years he’s been named by Broadcast Magazine as one of the top three directors across all UK TV genres. Before working in film he was an art teacher and, for two years, a dustman.

Zoe Sale is an award-winning journalist and filmmaker. She worked on both previous UK TV documentaries about Sri Lanka and was part of the team nominated with Callum Macrae for the Nobel Peace Prize for this. For the last thirteen 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.
Overwhelming and inspiring to see how targeted actions helped the film to achieve their goals in such a short period of time. Their work with world leaders, parliaments and international organizations is extremely thorough and could be a powerful model for achieving global awareness for other films.

No one can come away from watching No Fire Zone without the burning urge to campaign as much as humanly possible to bring Sri Lanka’s government to justice for what it has done… you suddenly have a room full of people who had never heard about these war crimes before, but now felt as though they could dedicate their lives to fighting for the victims.

— Myriam Gwynned Dijck, International Political Forum

**CAMPAIGN PARTNERS**

**ANNISTY INTERNATIONAL**

Key campaign partner. Both the international HQ office and many local national offices, notably in the UK, New Zealand, Geneva, the US and India. Advised and supported outreach initiatives, organised parliamentary and public screenings and used the film extensively in advocacy.

**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**

Helped organise many key screenings particularly in the EU and UN. Used the film extensively in advocacy work and facilitated key screenings.

**JOURNALISTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN SRI LANKA**

An organisation of multi-ethnic independent journalists from Sri Lanka. Many exiled after threats to their lives, they supported the filmmakers particularly in terms of evidence-gathering and independent advice.

**BRITISH TAMIL FORUM**

Supported the advocacy work of the team, organised screenings and invited the team’s participation in other events. Helped build public support for the work and linked them with key witnesses.

**GLOBAL TAMIL FORUM**

Organised key screenings including UK Parliament. Used the film extensively in advocacy and linked team with international activists and groups.

**TAMILS AGAINST GENOCIDE**

Supported the project from the start, used the film in advocacy, organised screenings and liaised closely on key issues such as sexual violence.

**AUSTRALIAN TAMIL CONGRESS**

Played a critical role in building widespread NGO and activist support for the Antipodean tour, organised several screenings and used the film extensively in advocacy.

**HUMAN RIGHTS LAW CENTRE, AUSTRALIA**

Played a key role in the Australian tour, organised the parliamentary screening with cross-party support and used the film extensively in advocacy.

**US TAMIL POLITICAL ACTION COUNCIL**

Have constantly used the film in advocacy and facilitated the team’s work in North American and Geneva.

**PUSAT KOMAS**

Malaysian Human Rights NGO organised a parliamentary screening and a private screening which was raided. Lena Hendry, a Pusat Komas staffer, was charged with censorship offences and faces three years in jail.

**BUDGET**

**Film Budget:** £250,000

**Funders:**

— Bertha BRITDOC Journalism Fund
— Channel 4
— Pulitzer Center
— Stichting Democratie en Media
— Worldview

**Outreach Budget:** £217,000

**Funders:**

— Avaaz
— Bertha BRITDOC Connect Fund
— General donations and collections at screenings
— Ian Darling
— Kickstarter
— Sigrid Rausing Trust
— The Funding Network

**PUSH THE LIMITS**

More than any other film, No Fire Zone connected the dots between the Sri Lankan government’s crimes and the international community’s failure to act. The filmmakers should be congratulated for making an important contribution to the ‘end game’ of supporting accountability.

— Richard Painter, Head of Special Projects, The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

No Fire Zone laid bare a hidden war, combining forensic journalism with unforgettable shocking video footage. This impact was brought to bear on the people of influence who most needed to see it; Prime Ministers, parliamentarians, diplomats and journalists, working in concert with human rights organisations and influencers. The campaign strategy was “top down” rather than “bottom up”, carefully and thoroughly planned as a targeted influencing campaign with the goal of nothing less than making a government accountable for its war crimes. The international nature of this campaign was its hallmark, launching in India, premiering at the UN in Geneva, screening at the EU Parliament, visiting the Commonwealth countries of Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and more, and making direct contact with diplomats and embassies from every country on the UN Human Rights Council. This was supported by rolling journalism on the part of the filmmakers, who continually updated the story and provided further revelations and news scoops at critical campaign junctures, setting a new precedent for how to conduct a global political campaign.

**CONCLUSION**

“Overwhelming and inspiring to see how targeted actions helped the film to achieve their goals in such a short period of time. Their work with world leaders, parliaments and international organizations is extremely thorough and could be a powerful model for achieving global awareness for other films.”

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— Myriam Gwynned Dijck, International Political Forum
PRESS
A 113-page summary of press coverage is published in the following issue document:

issuu.com/tpr-media/docs/final_no_fire_zone_complete_coverag

A small press sample which illustrates the quality of conversation around the issues raised in the film.
Revisiting the Horror in Sri Lanka

By Hendrijs Jothy
Published February 27, 2013

NEW DELHI — In the series of photographs shot in 2002, the bare-chested boy is first shown seated on a bench watching something outside the frame. Then he is seen having a snack. In the third image he is lying on the ground with bullet holes in his chest. The photographs, which were released last week by the British broadcaster Channel 4, appear to document the final moments in the life of 12-year-old Balachandra Prabhakaran, the youngest son of the slain founder of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Wages of Tamil Insurgency Piled by the Poor Left Behind

Share your thoughts on thecottquotemodelRights.com
Join the discussion

Connect With Us on Facebook twitter
for important news and headlines
Twitter: @ReportsandEditors

The images are from the documentary film “No Fire Zone,” which tells the story of Sri Lanka’s violent suppression of the Tamil Tigers’ equally violent revolution, which had come very close to setting a separate state for the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka. After 29 years of civil war between the Tamils, who are chiefly Hindu, and the Sinhalese majority, who are chiefly Buddhist, the Sri Lankan state was decisively won in 2009. Human rights activists say that thousands of Tamil civilians were killed as the battle for the capital, including Messrs. Prabhakaran and his family, did not die in action but were executed. They estimate that more than 200,000 Tamil civilians died in the final months of the war.

Within its borders, the Sri Lankan government seems to think that its Sinhalese population is set to accept their congratulations for ending the war, but it maintains a frightening indifference when the world questions its army of planned genocide.

“No Fire Zone” includes video footage and photographs shot on mobile phones by Tamil survivors and Sinhalese soldiers who were somehow leaked. The film’s director, Callum Macrae, told me that it will be screened at the 32nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.
Given a snack and then taken out and shot: Horrifying last moments of helpless boy, 12, who was 'executed by Sri Lankan army because his father was a Tamil Tiger leader'

- Balachandran Prabhakaran is seen with bullet wounds to the chest.
- He was the son of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, who was also killed at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war.
- Film director said pictures prove boy was 'executed in cold blood.'

By NICKY EYRE
Published: 19 January 2013 | Updated: 17:17, 19 January 2013

WARNING GRAPHIC CONTENT

Disturbing new images have emerged of the dead body of the 12-year-old son of a Tamil leader that researchers say could prove he was executed by Sri Lankan government forces.

The photographs of Balachandran Prabhakaran, son of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam battle leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, were taken in May 2009 at the end of the civil conflict with the rebels. The first pictures appear to show the child in the custody of Sri Lanka forces and he is seen sitting on a bench wrapped in a blanket and eating some food.

Scroll down for video