

Tamils call Sri Lankan peace offer "ambiguous", discuss counter-proposal
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Top Tamil Tiger leaders meeting in Paris on Saturday described a peace offer from the Sri Lankan government to restart a faltering peace process as "ambiguous" and said they would come up with their own counter-proposition by the middle of next week. The political leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Sinniah Paramu Tamilselvan, told reporters the government offer of limited autonomy was "ambiguous and does not contain enough power for the Tamils to run their own affairs in the northeast region" of the island state.

He added that he and nine other senior LTTE members were working on an offer that "reflects the aspirations of the Tamil people". Those talks, which were expected to go to Monday, were being held in a Paris hotel after the French government facilitated visas for the LTTE leaders to meet legal and constitutional advisors drawn from the Tamil diaspora, one of the representatives said. The internal meeting comes at a pivotal time. The Tigers pulled out of peace talks on April 21 after accusing the government of going back on promises made at six rounds of talks since September, and made the establishment of an interim administration a pre-condition for rejoining the negotiations.

Meanwhile, violence has surged on the island's multi-ethnic eastern region, where four Muslim men were recently killed by alleged Tiger rebels. Muslims are Sri Lanka's second largest minority after Tamils. President Chandrika Kumaratunga has said she is considering ending a concession to Tiger rebels linking the eastern region to the Tamil-dominated north. Last Friday her international affairs advisor, Lakshman Kadirgamar, accused Norway -- which was invited to broker a peace -- of going beyond its mandate and dictating terms to the government. The LTTE delegates in Paris made no comment on that, but Tamilselvan said Norway's special envoy, Erik Solheim, would not attend the talks but would be invited to Paris to hear the counter-proposal once it was finalised.