

## **Foreign Minister Bogollagama seek Belgian assistance for post-conflict development in Sri Lanka**



Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama on Monday (26 January 2009) invited Belgium to assist Sri Lanka in the post conflict development of the areas cleared of the LTTE.

The Minister made this request when he called on the recently appointed Belgian Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy in Brussels on Monday. It was noted that the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister was the first foreign dignitary received by the Prime Minister since he assumed office earlier this month. The Minister conveyed the greetings of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Prime Minister Van Rompuy, who is a long standing friend of Sri Lanka.

Minister Bogollagama briefed the Belgian Prime Minister on the successful installation of democratic institutions in the Eastern Province within months of liberating the region from the LTTE and also of the successful military campaign currently nearing its conclusion in the North. A Belgian team was invited to Sri Lanka to view first hand the structured approach adopted by Sri Lanka in terms of Post Conflict development and to explore areas in which it could assist.

The Belgian Prime Minister acknowledged the importance of socio-economic development in the post conflict process and the long term sustainability of peace. The Belgian authorities said they had expertise in assisting Sri Lanka in the demining process and would consider assistance in training and equipping Sri Lankan security forces in this field.

Foreign Minister Bogollagama also, informed the Belgian Prime Minister of the increasing number of moderate Tamil politicians who were now in dialogue with the Sri Lankan authorities to arrive at a political solution to find lasting solutions to the present conflict.

The Minister informed the Prime Minister of the danger of LTTE front organizations, which operate within the territory of Belgium and in Europe as a whole which collect funds on behalf of the LTTE, carry out illegal smuggling operations and other criminal activities. With the steadily diminishing military capabilities of the LTTE the danger of these operatives in Europe seeking asylum for remaining cadres in Sri Lanka, the increase of criminal and subversive activity within Europe was also highlighted. It was emphasized that Belgium shares with Sri Lanka the policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism.

The Minister suggested that Foreign Office Consultations, talks at the level of senior officials between the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs should be undertaken with a structured dialogue to cover all areas of bilateral relations and cooperation in the interest of strengthening the existing friendly bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and Belgium, which was welcomed by the Belgian Government.

Given the strategic location of Sri Lanka, its investor and business friendly economic regime and the favourable market access it enjoys with both India & Pakistan, the Foreign Minister invited the Belgian Government to open a resident mission in Sri Lanka which would further strengthen bilateral relations.

The meeting with the Prime Minister was preceded by official level consultations held between the Sri Lanka delegation led by Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union Ravinatha Aryasinha and the Belgian Foreign Office delegation led by Dirk Achten Foreign Secretary of Belgium.

At the conclusion of the meetings, the Minister was interviewed by the Belgian Flemish language newspaper De Standaard, the French language newspaper Le Soir.