

**Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama calls upon the European Union to view developments in Sri Lanka and in the Tamil diaspora within a post –LTTE paradigm**



Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama has called upon the European Union to view developments in Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora within a post –LTTE paradigm which better reflect the new ground realities in Sri Lanka and to become partners in Sri Lanka's post-conflict development.

The Minister made this call when he met the European Commissioner responsible for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and the European Commissioner responsible for Trade Catherine Ashton, in Brussels on Monday (26 January 2009). Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union Ravinatha Aryasinha and Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on International Legal Affairs Dr Rohan Perera were associated with the Minister.

The Minister said the military successes against the LTTE were a result of the clear sighted strategy embarked upon by President Mahinda Rajapaksa in August 2006 seeking to address the political issues relating to the current conflict through negotiations, to defeat the terrorism of the LTTE

militarily, following the LTTE walking away from efforts made at negotiating with the group. He emphasised that the achievements on the ground over the past few months in particular, demonstrated that the LTTE's fighting capabilities had been over-rated.

The Minister said the Government was clear that the ultimate solution to the present conflict is political, and that defeating the terrorists militarily had created an environment which enables the government to engage in a political process with a number of moderate Tamil politicians, devoid of their being under pressure from the LTTE, which would help in finding a mutually acceptable political settlement.

Responding to the Minister, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner acknowledged the significant military gains achieved by the Sri Lankan security forces. She said the present juncture in Sri Lanka while militarily important, was also politically important. The Commissioner hoped that this opportunity will be availed of by Sri Lanka to restore normalcy in the affected areas and to move forward with implementing an ambitious and sustainable political solution which can put Sri Lanka on the path towards peace and reconciliation between communities, so that all can contribute to the rebuilding of the country.

During the discussion the Minister briefed that the government had taken swift measures to establish a "Safe Corridor" so that civilians who were being held by the LTTE as human shields in uncleared areas can escape to safe ground.

Noting that several governments, the UN and INGOs had called upon the LTTE to permit the civilians to leave the area, the Minister asked that the EU add its voice to demand that the LTTE "let the people go". He said the experience gained in clearing of the Eastern Province following the eviction of the LTTE, will be replicated in the Northern Province. He noted that it would be re-called that in less than 6 months after the operations in the East were completed, 80% of those displaced were re-settled in their own homes, most of them had their livelihoods restored, local elections were held and even a Provincial Council was elected within one year.

Noting that many Governments including those of EU member countries, international organizations and INGOs are involved in post-conflict development work in the East, the Minister regretted that the EU was a noticeable absentee. He urged that this be corrected, because it was crucial that economic development take place to strengthen the restoration of democracy.

In discussion with both Commissioners, the Minister appreciated the significant impact the EU GSP+ facility had on Sri Lanka in making the EU Sri Lanka's No 1. export market, providing direct and indirect employment to well over 1 million people and helped Sri Lanka meeting Millennium Development Goals. He said Sri Lanka welcomes the European Commission decision to give 16 developing countries including Sri Lanka the GSP+ facility, for a period of three years i.e. from 01

January 2009 to end 2011, subject to a continuing dialogue and engagement with the Sri Lanka Government on the implementation of core human rights instruments.

Sri Lanka has extended cooperation to the UN/ILO convention treaty monitoring bodies relevant to the GSP+ process and also through its continuous interaction with the European institutions. The Government of Sri Lanka took the position that Sri Lanka has effectively implemented the three conventions highlighted by the EC and was willing to continue a dialogue in this respect. He said his presence along with a high level technical delegation which included Mr. Suhada Gamalath, Secretary/ Ministry of Justice and Legal Reform, Dr. Rohan Perera, Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on International Legal Affairs and Chair of the Committee developing the National Human Rights Action Plan, Mr. S B Divaratna, Commissioner General of Essential Services and Ms. Kshenuka Senewiratne, DG/ Europe and CIS, was aimed at achieving that objective.

Embassy of Sri Lanka  
Brussels, Belgium

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