

Media Release

French Foreign Minister and UK Foreign Secretary condemned the LTTE for holding the civilian population hostage in the “no fire zone”



The French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Dr. Bernard Kouchner and Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom David Miliband is on an official visit to Sri Lanka at the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Rohitha Bogollagama.

During their visit, Foreign Minister Kouchner and Foreign Secretary Miliband called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa and had a cordial discussion on the present developments. They also visited the IDP welfare centres in Vavuniya, and the Field Hospital donated by the French Government in Chettikulam. The visit takes place against the background of the current developments in the North of Sri Lanka, in particular the recent security forces action to liberate approximately 120,000 civilians, who were held hostage by the LTTE.

Following bilateral talks with the two visiting dignitaries, the Foreign Minister Chaired a meeting with the two delegations and all the relevant line Ministries involved with the current humanitarian efforts relating to the IDPs. The Attorney-General, the Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Secretaries to the Ministries of Healthcare & Nutrition, Social Services, Justice, Nation Building were present together with the Commissioner-General of Essential Services. The two delegations also had an opportunity to see an audio visual presentation including UAV footage of the humanitarian rescue operation by the security forces.

While welcoming the two visiting dignitaries, Foreign Minister Bogollagama stated that we are encouraged by the continued interest and concerns expressed by France and the UK on developments in Sri Lanka. He further stated that we are on the threshold of defeating terrorism and are embarking on an era of lasting peace and security for all our people. He spoke of the huge task of the humanitarian relief operations in place and thanked the UN, ICRC and the international community that are providing assistance to the Government of Sri Lanka. While specifically thanking France and UK for their special assistance he stated that he is happy to host the two dignitaries who have made this special trip to Sri Lanka in order to see for themselves and be engaged with the government of Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lanka side also briefed the visiting delegations on the ongoing efforts by the Government and the close collaboration with the international community as well as UN agencies and the ICRC, in supplying the needs of the displaced population including shelter, food and health. The Sri Lanka side further briefed the two delegations on the additional measures in place for long term resettlement as well as rehabilitation of surrendeeds. It was highlighted that the international assistance towards the de-mining process would facilitate and expedite long term resettlement.

The two visiting dignitaries thanked the Foreign Minister for the detailed briefing and appreciated the extensive ongoing efforts undertaken by the Government of Sri Lanka in managing the current humanitarian situation. They highlighted that their concern relating to the current situation focused on the security and welfare of the displaced civilian population. They condemned the LTTE for holding the civilian population hostage in the "no fire zone". They encouraged the Government of Sri Lanka to continue its cooperation with the UN agencies and ICRC and, to look at the possibility of providing more access to the international community.

Both Foreign Minister Kouchner and, Foreign Secretary Miliband agreed that the French and British Governments have stood with Sri Lanka during the 25 years of conflict and will continue to stand by Sri Lanka in the future. They also observed that Sri Lanka had reached a defining moment in the conflict.

Minister Bogollagama thanked the French Government for the medical assistance and for the increased financial contribution amounting to Euros 1.6 million towards the humanitarian agencies working in Sri Lanka. He also thanked the British Government for allocating a further 2.5 million Pounds, in addition to the 5 million Pounds already pledged, for humanitarian assistance. The Minister also welcomed their willingness to provide assistance in the post-conflict scenario.

During the visit to the IDP sites in Vavuniya and the French Field Hospital in Chettikulam, the visiting dignitaries obtained a first-hand impression of the relief efforts underway. They also held discussions with the Minister for Resettlement & Disaster Relief Services Rishard Bathiudeen and the GA/Vavuniya Mrs. Charles as well as the Competent Authority Major General W.A. Chandrasiri.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Colombo

29th April 2009