



**THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA
TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EUROPEAN UNION
27, RUE JULES LEJEUNE, 1050 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM**

Sri Lanka urges not to use the displaced persons in Sri Lanka as a political tool

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU, Ravinatha Aryasinha has urged that the displaced persons in Sri Lanka be not used as a political tool, but instead that those being critical, step up and help the Government to overcome the difficulties faced in looking after them and re-settling them. He said "these are our people, successive governments fed them, provided medicines, ensured education through the 30 years when the LTTE dominated their lives. We will ensure that they get back to their homes in safety, not because anybody tells us to do so, but because we want them to do so".

The Ambassador made these observations when he addressed a hearing held on Sri Lanka by the Human Rights Sub Committee of the European Parliament, chaired by MEP Heidi Hautala of the Finnish Green Party on Thursday (1 October 2009).

Responding to the comments made by panelists about the situation in the IDP camps Ambassador Aryasinha outlined the procedures that the government had presently undertaken to streamline the resettlement process. He said that around 1/6 of the displaced who were originally from the Jaffna district and the Eastern province had been sent back to these areas, while the displaced from the Mannar district are presently being resettled. Additionally advertisements have been placed, informing the public that they could host any relatives who might be in the Welfare Villages.

Refuting a suggestion that "demining has been used as a political tool to confine the IDPs to the camps", and that they "would be held indefinitely", the Ambassador showed on a map of the main population centers of the Northern Province with adjacent farm land that had been de-mined or ear marked for de-mining on a priority basis. He said GOSL had imported the most sophisticated technology for this purpose, which was evidence of its commitment to re-settle the people as fast as possible. The Ambassador also said he was shocked at the suggestion made by one MEP that the IDPs should be "allowed to go and take the risk of landmines", and remarked that GOSL had not rescued them from being held as human shields by the LTTE, to have them knowingly risk their lives due to left over LTTE mines.

He said the security concerns were not imagined, but very real, as it was well known that many LTTE cadres had come into the camps mingling with civilians, and GOSL didn't want them to go back and connect with hidden weapons and re-start terrorist acts. About 10,000 ex-LTTE cadres had already surrendered and many others had been identified on the basis of information. So far, out of approximately 290,000 people liberated from the LTTE, over 150,000 had been registered and 110,000 issued with ID cards. This would help gradually ensure freedom of movement.

Responding to comments that humanitarian agencies are not allowed into the camps, the Ambassador pointed out that there are 54 International agencies, INGOs and NGOs currently engaged in humanitarian work in the welfare villages. He said within the last week alone two high level UN officials visited these areas.

On GSP+, Ambassador Aryasinha said the Government had not accepted the process of GSP+ investigation and a request for experts to visit Sri Lanka as a matter of principle, as it was felt inappropriate and unnecessary and the Government was not willing to compromise on its sovereignty. However the Government has continued to engage with the European Commission on the relevant human rights conventions - through meetings at senior officials' level both in Brussels and Colombo, by providing material which showed Sri Lanka's compliance with these conventions, refute unfounded allegations, and above all provided periodic reviews to UN bodies which monitor these conventions. Responding to a query whether the 4 member Ministerial Committee appointed recently by the President of Sri Lanka would be providing a response to the GSP+ investigation expert's report, the Ambassador said there would be no response to the expert's report from Government. The Government will continue to engage on the issues of concern with the Commission.

Responding to comments made on the judgment in the Tissainayagam case, the Ambassador said one cannot on the one hand demand separation of powers and an independent Judiciary, and on the other hand press for the executive to overrule the judicial system. He added that while speakers gave the impression that Mr. Tissainayagam was convicted by the High Court for writing two articles which in the view of the prosecution had the effect of inciting communal disharmony, they forget the more serious charge proved, which was that he had accepted funds from the LTTE. He asked whether journalists in Europe accepting a cheque from Al Quida, would be acceptable?

Mr Andrew Stroelheim of the International Crisis Group, Mr Sunanda Deshapriya, Journalist, Mr Antoine Gerard of the UN/Humanitarian Affairs Office in Belgium, Mr David Tirr and Mr. Rolf Timmens, of the European Commission, and several MEPs addressed the 2 hour session.

Embassy of Sri Lanka
Brussels

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