



Friends of Sri Lanka rally in support of Sri Lankan trade with Europe

The 'Friends of Sri Lanka' in the European Parliament thwarted moves by some MEPs to seek to suspend Sri Lanka's GSP+ trade status in a hurriedly moved Urgency Resolution debated in Strasbourg on Thursday (22 October). The resolution was initiated against the backdrop of a report by the European Commission on Sri Lanka's GSP+ status, which was released on Monday (19 October) and which concluded that Sri Lanka had fallen short in the effective implementation of some of the UN conventions relevant to the scheme. Whilst direct reference to GSP+ was removed, the resolution still emphasised the importance that trade would play in Sri Lankan reconstruction.

Mr Geoffrey Van Orden MEP, Chairman of the 'Friends of Sri Lanka' group, who participated in the inter-party negotiations on the compromise urgency text, said: *"the Friends of Sri Lanka have consistently advocated that it is trade, not aid, that provides the best route to economic recovery and improvement."* He has also called on the European Commission to reconsider its findings on Sri Lanka's GSP+ status and has urged the Sri Lanka government to engage with the Commission on issues of concern.

The Friends of Sri Lanka group also called for greater international humanitarian assistance and urged the international community, and the EU Commission in particular, to provide additional support for urgent mine clearance action in northern Sri Lanka. It also called for Sri Lanka now to accede to the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty. Earlier this month, in collaboration with the Embassy of Sri Lanka, the group hosted a photographic exhibition in the European Parliament entitled: "Sri Lanka: Facets of Post Conflict Development" which highlighted the reconstruction work currently being undertaken by the government in northern Sri Lanka.

While supporting calls for Colombo to strictly adhere to human rights standards, the resolution welcomed the introduction of the Victim and Witness Assistance and Protection Bill in the Sri Lankan Parliament and was happy to note that the Sri Lankan government has developed a National Plan of Action for the Encouragement of Human Rights (NHRAP).

The resolution also recognised that local elections in northern Sri Lanka had been conducted peacefully and called on all Tamil leaders in Sri Lanka to seriously engage in a political settlement and to renounce terrorism once and for all.