

## **Sri Lanka rebuts unfounded allegations in the European Parliament**

“No military operation to defeat terrorism in the world is conducted without difficulty to the civilian population who live in the afflicted area. In the achievement of our military dominance over the LTTE, the civilians, held at gun point by the LTTE have been the centre of our concerns. In the past 2 months, the Security Forces have held back their strength, even at the cost of suffering casualties themselves. The ground reality has unfortunately been disregarded in the European Parliament’s Resolution of 12 March and makes several unsubstantiated assertions which the Government of Sri Lanka finds objectionable”. These observations were made by the Charge d’ Affaires of the Sri Lanka Embassy in Belgium, accredited to the European Union, Ms. Saroja Sirisena, at a meeting of the Human Rights Sub Committee of the European Parliament held in Brussels yesterday (30 March 2009).

Speaking further, she said “We do not need to be reminded of the responsibility towards our citizens nor of our commitments in the international arena. It is accepted by the UN Resident Coordinator in Colombo, that the figure of 2300 civilian deaths and 6500 injuries since late January this year attributed to unnamed ‘credible sources’ cannot be substantiated. These are the very same figures quoted by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Crisis Group and also stated in the LTTE website Tamilnet. These ‘anecdotal’ figures are stated as fact in the European Parliament’s Resolution of 12 March”.

Notwithstanding an invitation to the Sri Lanka Mission to participate in the proceedings, the Chair of the meeting, MEP Helen Flautre of the French Green Party, from the outset, adopted a hostile and belligerent attitude towards the Sri Lankan representative, persistently interrupting her while she was making her presentation on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka. This was in sharp contrast to the unlimited time afforded to other speakers including MEP Robert Evans and Mr. Andrew Stroelheim of the International Crisis Group, who preceded the Sri Lankan Charge d’ Affaires. Responding to the incessant interruptions from the Chair, Ms. Sirisena pointed out that if she was not allowed to make her Statement, it would mean that the Committee did not wish the Government of Sri Lanka to participate in the meeting. It was only thereafter that she was able to continue with her Statement, although the interruptions from the Chair also continued unabated.

Ms. Sirisena strongly rebutted the charge against the Government of indiscriminate shelling of civilians. She noted, "To the contrary, we have at all times observed extreme caution in the operational area, conscious that civilians are being used by the LTTE as a human shield. It is the LTTE that abused the 48 hour no fire period declared by the Government to move heavy weaponry into safe zones, explode suicide bombs in welfare centres and on food convoys and continues to fire at civilians fleeing the uncleared areas. It is only last week that the LTTE targeted anti aircraft missiles on the SLAF engaged in evacuating civilians from their last strong hold in the Wannu. Despite this more than 60,000 civilians to date have entered into welfare centres through the safe zones established by the Government".

In contrast to the Statements made by other speakers which were nothing more than thinly disguised anti-Sri Lankan propaganda churned out by the LTTE, MEP, Dr. Charles Tannock of the UK called the LTTE, "an armed and dangerous terrorist organization" and responding to MEP Robert Evans' position on the ongoing military operations, drew a parallel with the Allied Forces campaign against Nazi Germany, and emphasized the need to defeat the LTTE militarily, before re-establishing the structures of democratic governance. He also asserted that the LTTE is not the legitimate representative of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. Noting that there have been instances in the past where Tamils had been discriminated, Dr. Tannock called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to put forward an inclusive political solution to the conflict.

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