

Sri Lanka engages UN Security Council Members at an informal briefing

In a further demonstration of the Government policy of engagement with the international community relating to the current situation in Sri Lanka, the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN, New York, Ambassador H.M.G.S Palihakkara briefed the Members of the UN Security Council during an informal interactive discussion on Thursday, 26th March 2009. Sir John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator also briefed the gathering. The meeting was held outside the formal structure of the UN Security Council. During the briefing, Ambassador Palihakkara addressed three broad aspects of the current situation - humanitarian, security and political.

With regard to the humanitarian issues, the Ambassador pointed out that the Government Agencies were continuing their intensive efforts to address the needs of the civilians in the shrinking areas where the LTTE is holding the civilian population by force. In this humanitarian endeavor, the Government is working closely with the UN Country Team in Sri Lanka as well as the ICRC, international organizations and church groups who are present on the ground. He detailed the enhanced arrangements that the Government has put in place to transport food and medical supplies into the "Safe Zone", where the civilians are being held captive by the LTTE. The Government initiative to evacuate patients and accompanying civilians from the "Safe Zone" continues with the assistance of the ICRC.

The areas under LTTE control have now been reduced to a minimum and the Government is confident that terrorism will be defeated in the near future. However, the Government is determined to ensure that this process will not involve civilian casualties and therefore, extra precautions have been taken.

Ambassador Palihakkara also appreciated the fact that the Co-chairs, the UN, neighbouring countries and many members of the Security Council have called on the LTTE to free the civilians and to discuss modalities for surrendering their weapons and cadres.

The UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Sir John Holmes, who also briefed the informal meeting, stated that civilians are now trapped in a very small area. According to Sir John, the LTTE continues to reject the Government's call to lay down arms and to let the civilian population leave, and has significantly stepped up forced recruitment and forced labour of civilians. He called on all who can exert any direct or indirect influence on the LTTE, for example, through the Tamil diaspora, to use their influence to persuade the LTTE to give people the choice to leave and stop forced recruitment and the use of civilians as human shields. He also informed that at least 02 UN local staff, 03 dependants and 11 NGO local staff have been subject to forcible recruitment by the LTTE in recent weeks. The UN and NGO local staff and their dependants are also being held captive with civilians in the "No Fire Zone".

Ambassador Palihakkara further outlined the constructive interaction that has been initiated with the UN Under-Secretary-General, Sir John Holmes, following his visit to Sri Lanka relating to the welfare of IDPs who have escaped the LTTE and come into the cleared areas.

With regard to the political process, he informed the UN Security Council Members that President Mahinda Rajapaksa has initiated a dialogue forum to develop appropriate governance structures, including devolution of power. The major Tamil and Muslim democratic parties have been encouraged to attend this forum, which is designed to encourage a broad-based political solution. Following the success in the Eastern Province, it is the intention of the Government to reactivate democratic political structures in the Northern Province as well.

The meeting concluded following an interactive exchange of views with several Members of the UN Security Council.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Colombo
27th March 2009

