

Time for a Fresh start in Sri Lanka - Tamil Tigers should lay down their arms

As Sri Lankan government forces intensify their military operations to root out the last remnants of the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) holed up in a small area near Mullaitivu, the European Parliament has called on the insurgents to lay down their arms and participate in the democratic political process. The Parliament passed its sixth resolution on the situation in Sri Lanka with the support of all major political groups, with the exception of the socialists.

British Conservative Geoffrey Van Orden MEP, who chairs the informal Parliamentary association Friends of Sri Lanka, and has initiated most of the Parliament's resolutions, commented:

"The British government in particular, as well as the EU and other friendly governments, must do all they can to assist the Sri Lankan authorities in humanitarian relief in the Northern areas that have now been liberated from the grip of the LTTE ("Tamil Tigers").

"To prevent further carnage, for the sake of all the civilians now trapped by the fighting, and to improve the future prospects for Sri Lanka, the remaining LTTE elements should now give up."

"It is then vital that the Government moves quickly to reassure all its Tamil citizens that it will be vigorous and pro-active in addressing both their economic and political concerns. This is not only the right thing to do but will also help ensure that any residual support for armed insurgency and terrorism evaporates."

"The development of the long-neglected areas in the North and East, which for many years have been under LTTE control, should be a top priority. This is where the international community should help. Government action to restore full media freedom, investigate allegations of human rights abuses, and sign up to the Ottawa Treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines, will all help reassure foreign donors and encourage international action to stifle any continued LTTE fund-raising."