

Community Outreach Programme launched in Belgium



An outreach programme has been launched by the Sri Lanka Embassy in Belgium. This is in line with President Mahinda Rajapaksa's vision to engage the Sri Lankan expatriate communities abroad through the network of Embassies. The programme was launched at a luncheon held at the official residence of Sri Lankan Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union, Ravinatha Aryasinha in Brussels recently. The main objective of this programme is to re-integrate expatriates with Sri Lanka and to leverage their capabilities to promote Sri Lanka in Belgium & Luxembourg. Approximately 150 people from the different regions of Belgium and Luxembourg, including Sri Lankan students studying in Belgian Universities; representing the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim & Burgher communities, participated in this event.

Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Aryasinha said Sri Lanka was at a critical juncture in its history, when the security forces were on the verge of clearing the Northern Province of the LTTE and the Government was implementing an aggressive development strategy, including in areas previously dominated by the LTTE. He appealed to the community to remain engaged with these processes in their motherland, and both as organisations as well as individuals, to play an active role in supporting the developmental efforts in Sri Lanka and in helping to leverage policy in their adopted lands, in a manner that serves the interests of Sri Lanka. He also urged the community to treat the Embassy as an own extension of Sri Lanka, beyond a place for obtaining consular services and to regularly participate and engage in Embassy activities.

In this spirit, the Embassy has also instituted the practice of conducting commemorative events to celebrate festivals of the four great religions of Sri Lanka -Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Accordingly, on 19th September, the Embassy in Belgium together with Sri Lankan expatriates and other well wishers held an Iftar function(breaking fast of Muslims observing the Ramazan fast) at the Embassy premises. Ambassador Aryasinha addressing the gathering said such events help to create a profound appreciation of the richness of the diversity in Sri Lankan society and celebrate the strength it engenders, which is something Sri Lankans can be rightly proud of. He said such events also highlighted the role of the Embassy as a catalyst that unites the cultural, social and religious diversity among Sri Lankans. He recalled the valuable contributions being made since time immemorial by the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, towards political and economic development and also to Sri Lanka's cultural and religious mosaic.

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