

## **MEP Robert Evans attempts to sully Sri Lanka's good name in the European eye**

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the EU, Ravinatha Aryasinha has said that contradictory messages communicated to different audiences by Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Robert Evans, Chairman of a visiting European Parliamentary Delegation to Sri Lanka in July 2008, were "an attempt to sully the good name of Sri Lanka in the European eye, while at the same time scoring brownie points with a constituency due to vote in the upcoming European Parliamentary election". Describing the delegation's draft report prepared by the Chairman and Secretariat as "replete with unsubstantiated allegations, deliberate distortions and blatant falsehoods", Ambassador Aryasinha said "it underlines the patent bias of its authors against Sri Lanka" and "seeks to merely highlight negatives, ignore positives, and disregard the context of a country fighting one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world - the LTTE". Highlighting the ruthlessness of the LTTE, he said, "A truism once again demonstrated only yesterday in Anuradhapura, through the dastardly LTTE terrorist attack on the Opposition Leader of the North Central Provincial Council who belonged to the United National Party (UNP) Major General Janaka Perera".

Ambassador Aryasinha made these observations at a discussion on the draft report of the 5th European Parliament/Sri Lanka Inter Parliamentary Meeting (IPM), at the Session of the South Asia Delegation of the European Parliament held in Brussels on Tuesday (7th October 2008). The meeting co-chaired by MEP Robert Evans, Chair of the South Asia Delegation and MEP Baroness Sarah Ludford, Vice Chair of the Sub Committee on Human Rights, was attended by members of the South Asia Delegation, including those who visited Sri Lanka, diplomatic representatives from South Asian countries, Dr. Peter Schalk and Dr. John Neelsen, known sympathizers of the LTTE from the European Initiative for a Negotiated Peace in Sri Lanka, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Parliamentarian, Padmini Sithamparanathan, and a large number of members of the British Tamil Forum (BTF), an alleged front of the LTTE, who were present at MEP Evans' invitation.

In a comprehensive critique of the draft report, pointing to the contradictions in MEP Evans' characterization of the delegation's aborted visit to Trincomalee, the Ambassador said that while at a Colombo press conference, Mr. Evans had claimed that that "despite repeated assurances, endless complications resulted in the party being turned back from Ratmalana Airport", at a pro-LTTE rally in Harrow, he took credit for having prevented the visit because "I (Evans) refused to give only a photo opportunity of shaking hands with Pillayan, the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province". Observing that "it would seem obvious that by avoiding the visit to the East, members of the delegation were deprived of experiencing first-hand, one of the proudest achievements of Sri Lanka in recent times", Ambassador Aryasinha referring to the dramatic developments in the Eastern Province, said "the draft report makes no effort to contribute to the winds of change; instead it prefers to stand against the tide of history".

Responding to the draft report's alarmist views on the IDPs resulting from the current military operations in the North to free the people from the dictatorial control of the LTTE, the Ambassador said that IDPs in Sri Lanka "includes approximately 300,000 displaced before 2006", and that "when the Eastern Province was cleared of the LTTE in 2006/2007, it is true that the IDPs in the East came to approximately 200,000 but, following prompt action by the Government, certified by the UNHCR as having satisfied international standards, today only 28,000 remain as IDPs in the area, this too because their places of residence are yet to be cleared of the landmines laid by the LTTE". He said "it is important that we bear in mind that the situation of those displaced due to the on-going military operations in the Vanni, as previously in the case of the East, is merely a temporary dislocation. The civilians so displaced are being encouraged to move out of these areas through "humanitarian

corridors” created in order that the security forces can put an end to terrorism in Sri Lanka and in order that they avoid being used by the LTTE as “human shields”. He questioned, “if the authors of this report had any genuine concern for those people, as to why they did not join the growing chorus of international opinion that has called upon the LTTE to take urgent action to allow free movement of civilians” and “not to hold them as human shields”. “Instead, the import of the draft report is tantamount to putting pressure on the Government to stop its military operations against the LTTE terrorists – effectively throwing a lifeline to the terrorists”. Allaying fears raised in the draft report, about the “conditions” of the IDPs presently in the Vanni, he noted that on 2nd October, 07 UN staffers and 3 persons from the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) accompanied a convoy of 51 trucks with 650 MT of food, clothing, shelter and medical needs to the Vanni, and that the Government of Sri Lanka is committed to ensuring that at least one convoy per week will be undertaken with an approximate delivery of around 3,500 MT of food per month.

He noted that on “GSP+ issues”, in comparison to the strident statements made by MEP Evans in Colombo “that if he had the choice, Sri Lanka would not be given GSP+” and, at the pro-LTTE rally in Harrow where he stated that “Sri Lanka would lose its GSP+ concessions”, the observations made in the draft report are more measured. Referring to the draft report’s questioning of the applicability of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in Sri Lanka, he said it was clear that they were “ill-informed”, since in March 2008, upon President Mahinda Rajapaksa seeking its opinion, the Supreme Court expressed the view that adequate recognition was available in Sri Lanka to the civil and political rights contained in the ICCPR and that the rights recognized in the ICCPR are justiciable through the medium of legal and constitutional processes prevailing in Sri Lanka. Referring to an assertion in the draft report that the Joint Apparel Association had proposed a constitutional amendment that the opposition had agreed to support, Ambassador said, “I have checked this information with the Joint Apparel Association and have been told that the Joint Apparel Association at no stage made any proposal to anyone regarding seeking support to change the constitution, which suggests that the delegation is going on the basis of a false premise”.

Ambassador Aryasinha concluded his Statement by expressing the hope that the damage caused by the report presented by the Chairman of the European Parliamentary Delegation for Relations with South Asia, Mr. Robert Evans, MEP, would be repaired and that the Government of Sri Lanka can continue to engage with the President and Members of the European Parliament, as a credible body.

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Brussels

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