

## **EC condemns LTTE terrorism and reiterates support for Sri Lanka's sovereignty**



The European Commission (EC) has reiterated its unconditional support for Sri Lanka's sovereignty and its firm opposition to secession. It has also strongly condemned LTTE terrorism in the island. This European Union (EU) policy on Sri Lanka was articulated by the leader of the EC delegation João Aguiar Machado, Deputy Director General for Relations with Asia and Latin America at the European Commission in Brussels, at the 17th session of the Sri Lanka – EC Joint Commission which concluded in Colombo yesterday (10 June 2008).

Foreign Secretary Dr. Palitha Kohona who led the Sri Lankan delegation, while welcoming the EC side, underscored the importance that Sri Lanka attaches to its relations with the EU, not least due to the fact that the EU is Sri Lanka's largest economic partner, accounting for 37.5 % of exports. He noted that the Joint Commission is meeting after a lapse of almost four years, since the last session in Brussels in October 2004. He emphasized the need to maintain the spirit of mutual goodwill that had been generated during the EU Troika meeting in Colombo in March 2008, in a sustained engagement between both parties. He said that the Joint Commission meeting provided an ideal opportunity for the two sides to discuss a wide gamut of issues of mutual interest in the comprehensive partnership that exists between Sri Lanka and the EU.

The Head of the EC delegation Mr. Machado endorsed Dr. Kohona's suggestion that the Joint Commission meets more regularly and hoped that this could take place annually. He stated that the EU's present relationship with Sri Lanka is based on the 1995 Agreement, which has paved the way to deepen and widen its ties with Sri Lanka in a number of mutually beneficial fields.

He emphasized that any perception that the EU is critical of Sri Lanka and supportive of the LTTE is absolutely incorrect. Mr. Machado stressed that the EU has always been a good friend of Sri Lanka and has unreservedly condemned LTTE terrorism, particularly the recent spate of bomb attacks targeting innocent civilians using public transport. He mentioned the EU - wide ban on the LTTE and disclosed that the EC has encouraged member states to pursue vigorous action against LTTE activities in their territories. In this context, he noted that the EU would be having a separate discussion dedicated to the fight against terrorism with the Foreign Ministry on the following day (11 June 2008).

The Foreign Secretary briefed the EC delegation on current political and economic developments in Sri Lanka, inter alia the restoration of democracy and civil administration in the Eastern Province following the successful conclusion of Provincial Council elections, the APRC process and human rights issues. In response to a query from the EC delegation regarding the current status of the Peace Process, he stated that Sri Lanka has kept the door open for the LTTE to return to the negotiating table, after it makes a firm commitment to peace. Norway remains the facilitator and Sri Lanka appreciates the continued engagement of the EU as one of the Co-Chairs.

While elaborating on the benefits that Sri Lanka has gained from the GSP + scheme, which has provided preferential access for Sri Lanka's exports to the EU market, the Foreign Secretary highlighted the fact that the principal beneficiaries of this facility are 350,000 women who are

employed mainly in garment factories in the rural hinterland. Many of these women are the sole bread winners of their families, accounting for almost 1 million people. The EU concession has enabled not only the economic emancipation of rural women, but has also significantly alleviated rural poverty. Dr. Kohona stated that Sri Lanka has fully complied with all 27 conventions on human rights, labour, governance and the environment, which are required to qualify for the GSP+ facility. He thanked the EU for granting this preferential tariff facility, which has also contributed to the diversification of Sri Lanka's export production base, particularly in expanding exports of bicycles, rubber products, fruits and vegetables, foliage plants and seafood to the vast EU market. The EC side stated that the Commission is currently working out the eligibility criteria and requirements for countries to apply for the GSP+ scheme and that the relevant regulation is expected to be issued shortly. Once the regulation is issued, interested countries may submit their applications to the Commission before the deadline of 31 October 2008.

Mr. Machado welcomed the recent political developments in the Eastern Province, and expressed EU support for the "relative pacification of the Eastern Province", while noting that the EU was still concerned about the continued presence of armed groups. Dr. Kohona responded by stating that it is the government policy that only the Sri Lankan government security forces and the police had the legitimate right to bear arms. He reiterated that all armed groups, including the LTTE must be disarmed. However, he noted that in the past, particularly in the aftermath of the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA), which required the disarmament of groups other than the LTTE, members of these groups had been systematically and brutally eliminated by the LTTE.

The two sides also broadly discussed issues pertaining to civil aviation and environment. The EC delegation informed the Sri Lankan side of the need for the early conclusion of a horizontal agreement with the EC, which would form the framework to cover bilateral air services agreements with individual member states, in compliance with a recent ruling of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The EC acknowledged the need for additional funding to assist developing countries to meet the challenge posed by climate change. In this context, the availability of funding to the tune of € 90 million in multi annual - assistance for Asian countries, including Sri Lanka under the SWITCH – Asia Programme, to fund projects to improve the environmental sustainability of small and medium sized industrial enterprises, was highlighted.

The Foreign Secretary briefed the EC delegation on the forthcoming SAARC Summit to be held in Colombo and expressed the hope that the EU, which is one of the 7 Observers, will be represented at the highest level. He noted that SAARC has moved away from the traditional mode of merely issuing declarations of intent to positive measures of implementation, which would be of direct benefit to the peoples of the region.

The one-day meeting was preceded by two preparatory sessions held on the previous day (09 June 2008) at the Foreign Ministry. Secretary / Ministry of Nation Building & Estate Infrastructure Development, W.K.K. Kumarasiri, Secretary/ Ministry of Resettlement & Disaster Relief Services, A.C.M. Razik, Secretary / Ministry of Environment & Natural Resources, M.A.R.D. Jayatillaka, Secretary / Ministry of Disaster Management & Human Rights, Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the EU, Ravinatha Aryasinha, and senior officials of line agencies and the Foreign Ministry were represented on the Sri Lankan delegation.

Mr. Machado was assisted by the Head of Unit for Asia at the EC Headquarters in Brussels, Helen Campbell, Ambassador Julian Wilson, Head of the delegation at the EC in Colombo, Head of Operations and Deputy Chief of Mission Peter Maher, Desk Officer for Sri Lanka at the EC Headquarters in Brussels, Andrea Nicholaj, Deputy Head of Mission of the French Embassy in Colombo, Jacques Villemain, representing the current EU Presidency held by Slovenia, as well as

other senior officials.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Colombo

11 June 2008