

New efforts to reach out to EU Parliamentarians

Continuing the dialogue between Sri Lanka and the European Institutions, the Sri Lanka Embassy in Brussels has strengthened a programme to actively engage Members of the European Parliament (MEP) representing the Member States, as well as the respective European Political Groups.

Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha held consultations with leading MEPs of the South Asia Delegation in the European Parliament, as well as MEPs who have shown interest in developments in Sri Lanka in recent times. Additionally, Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary General/Secretariat for Co-ordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) visiting Brussels last week to participate in a dialogue between Asian and European Liberals, provided briefings also to the Conservative and Socialist groups in the European Parliament on current developments in Sri Lanka.

Prof. Wijesinha noted that the human rights situation in the country has vastly improved in recent times, with the strengthening of the democratic process especially after clearing the Eastern Province of the LTTE and the restoration of civil administration in the area. Emphasising that a political settlement was needed to overcome aspects of the present conflict, he made clear the commitment of the government to develop space for active involvement in the State and its structures for all citizens of all communities. At the same time, given the continuing intransigence of the LTTE with regard to negotiations, and the manner in which it had continuously violated the Ceasefire Agreement, he said the government was compelled to resort to military means to ensure that the LTTE understood that terrorism could not succeed. He said unfortunately it was clear that the LTTE was now hoping that sections of the international community will throw them a lifeline.

In his interactions with MEPs Ambassador Aryasinha, while appreciating the action taken by the EU to proscribe the LTTE as a terrorist organization in 2006, observed that it was imperative that all EU Member States also proceeded to take action against the front organizations of the group which acted in the guise of economic, humanitarian, religious and social bodies and were engaged in fund raising for terrorist purposes in many parts of Europe. Whilst some countries had responded with legal action, inconsistencies about this allowed LTTE terrorism to continue. Responding to concerns relating to the forthcoming GSP+ review, Ambassador Aryasinha observed that it is unfortunate that the different requirements in the GSP+ regulation are not given equal focus. Drawing attention to the numerous steps taken by the government to achieve high standards with regard to human rights, environment, labour and good governance - the stipulated criteria for the receipt of GSP+ advantages, he said this made Sri Lanka a credible trading partner for the EU. He urged MEPs to lend their voice to bringing objectivity to the GSP+ review process.

The MEPs were appreciative of the opportunity to interact and obtain current information on developments and said the Embassy should remain engaged with them on a continuous basis. It was also noted that under the proposed Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament would gain co-determining power within the EU system and that a better understanding of developments in Sri Lanka would help MEPs make more informed decisions.

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Brussels

22nd April 2008