
EU MPS condemn LTTE

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Members of the European Parliament yesterday adopted a resolution "condemning the LTTE's violence and intimidation which are preventing civilians from leaving the conflict area", and "callings for an immediate ceasefire by the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE in order to allow the civilian population to leave the combat zone".

In a debate at the European Parliament held in Strasbourg on Wednesday night, British Conservative MEP and Chairman of the 'Friends of Sri Lanka Group' Geoffrey van Orden told Parliament that "the LTTE is now in a desperate end game and, typically in such situations, is turning to international apologists to get it off the hook." Referring suggestions to water down the statement in favour of the LTTE, Van Orden said: "We cannot support amendments to the resolution before us based on unattributable and often nonsensical allegations or selective quotation from one NGO report. And we have no good reason to dispute the Government's firm assertion that its troops have not fired on no-fire zones and nor will they". He added: "The greatest service all in this House can do is to call on the LTTE to lay down its arms and to release the civil population from its grip. Then much-needed humanitarian aid can be delivered, people can begin to look forward to better lives, and all Sri Lankans can get back on the path of democratic politics and building a fair and more prosperous society for all its citizens, free from terrorist oppression". British Conservative MEP and Conservative Foreign Affairs Spokesman Charles Tannock said "we should be resolute in our support for President Rajapaksa and his efforts to end an insurgency that has brought untold human misery to Sri Lanka and severely retarded economic development on that beautiful island. However, thousands of innocent civilian IDPs still remain trapped on a narrow coastal strip. These civilians must be allowed to leave so that the army can conclude its offensive. It is reprehensible but entirely to be expected of the Tigers that they are exploiting these civilians as human shields. The Tigers have been deaf to appeals from the international community to surrender or establish a temporary humanitarian corridor. Nevertheless, allowing the UN and other organizations to arrange safe passage from the conflict zone for these civilians is essential to avoid a bloodbath. Sri Lanka appreciates its own responsibility in this regard and wants to avoid civilian casualties but understandably the army's patience is limited and fears that the Tigers will seek to escape by a sea evacuation mixing in with the civilians. Therefore we endorse the establishment of a humanitarian corridor and an immediate and temporary cessation of hostilities but we also want to see the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE and a peaceful, just and multi-ethnic Sri Lanka established in its place, where there is maximum autonomy to the Tamil majority areas and an equitable sharing of resources and power within a unitary Sri Lankan state". German Socialist MEP Jo Leinen said: "I agree that the solution to Sri Lanka's problems should be a political one and not a military one. The LTTE must make a step that it is not taking and that is to lay down its arms and put an end to terrorism. Imagine a member state of the EU under terrorism for 25 years? With all the resultant chaos you can easily imagine that I am in favour of the Tamil's cause, but reject the method of the LTTE. For weeks now we have been hearing about hundreds of thousands of people being trapped in a small area of land. We heard according to eye witnesses that people are being shot if they leave this zone. We must call upon the LTTE to end these practices. This can't go on like this. We must call on the government to respect international law and allow in humanitarian aid. There is a fundamental demand on both sides to help the victims. We must prepare for the post-war period. The 13th Amendment to the constitution must be applied to provide a certain amount of self-governance and the EU can provide assistance. I am sure that the Commissioner is prepared to do that." European Commissioner for External Relations Benota Ferraro-Waldner who made observations during the debate said: "As one of the Co-chairs of the Tokyo peace process, the EU was particularly pre-occupied with the plight of thousands of internally displaced persons trapped by fighting in Northern Sri Lanka". She said: "The Government's recent announcement to open for evacuation roads at the North and the South of the no fire zone is indeed a positive step. But we want to know how this work will be practiced. We have called on the LTTE and the Sri Lankan authorities to protect the civilian population as required under the International Humanitarian Law, to allow the safe and voluntary movement of people away from the conflict zone". The Commissioner added that "the Commission is convinced that the outcome of this crisis will have lasting consequences to peace reconciliation and the unity of Sri Lanka and in this context supports calls by Sir John Holmes to the Government of Sri Lanka to interrupt the hostilities to allow time for the civilian population to get out safely and to the LTTE to let the civilians go and agree to a peaceful end to a fighting. Also the co-chairs have appealed to the LTTE to lay down their arms, but unfortunately I have to say that this call has been rejected, even ignored". Courtesy: Defence.lk