
Foreign Minister tells Denmark that Sri Lankan forces do not target no-fire zone

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Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama has categorically stated that the Sri Lankan security forces do not direct any attacks on the Government declared no-fire zone along the Mullaitivu coast, notwithstanding the constant artillery barrage launched at the military by the LTTE. He said that the security forces themselves suffered casualties by not returning fire, precisely in order to avoid causing casualties among civilians who are being held hostage by the LTTE in this area. The Minister explained this position to his Danish counterpart Per Stig Moller, who telephoned him yesterday (25 March 2009) and discussed current developments in Sri Lanka, with particular reference to the humanitarian situation in the North.

Recalling their telephone conversation last month, Minister Bogollagama stated that the security forces were closing in on the LTTE and increasingly large numbers of civilians were fleeing the conflict area and seeking the safety and security of the Government controlled areas. He further stated that the Government was doing whatever possible to facilitate the civilians to escape from the clutches of the LTTE to the cleared areas. Responding to a query by the Danish Foreign Minister with regard to the involvement of the UN and ICRC, Minister Bogollagama explained that the welfare transit villages were being assisted by the UN while the ICRC has been involved with the evacuation of civilians by sea. In addition, he referred to the involvement of the WFP and the ICRC in the transport of food and medical supplies by sea and their distribution to the civilians in the conflict area. The Foreign Minister categorically rejected the allegation that the Sri Lankan Government troops were shelling the no-fire zone, and stated that the nature of injuries sustained by the civilians would support this position. He expressed concern at the false propaganda carried out by the LTTE and its network of sympathizers abroad in order to win the sympathy of the international community by the militarily weakened LTTE. The Danish Foreign Minister Moller hoped that the conflict would end in the near future and lasting peace would dawn in Sri Lanka. Minister Bogollagama sharing these sentiments stated that the end of the conflict is imminent, but as would be expected, the LTTE is resisting the advance of the military into the final area of their domination. He thanked his Danish counterpart for the action taken with regard to the TRO fund raising activities in Denmark and observed that this action was a positive step in assisting Sri Lanka to counter terrorism. The two Ministers appreciated the opportunity to exchange views and agreed to continue this constructive engagement. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Colombo 26 March 2009