Government seeks Partnership with Diaspora for Reconciliation and Peace building in the North

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Colombo (Asiantribune.com): The Government of Sri Lanka is committed towards developing a partnership with the Sri Lankan Diaspora in promoting a new era of peace through reconciliation among the different communities and implementing an economic plan to reconstruct the war ravaged North of the country.

This pledge was made by Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama at the inauguration of a two day Sri Lankan Diaspora Dialogue in Colombo yesterday (28th March 2009) organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Minister, elaborating on the involvement with the Diaspora in the post conflict era, stated that the initial engagement should evolve into a partnership with the Government as a stakeholder. This partnership, he said would be through political empowerment of the people and economic development of the North. The Minister pointed out this dialogue that the Government has now initiated as being the first opportunity for the diverse views of the Tamil community of Sri Lankan origin living abroad to be freely articulated. Hitherto, their voices have been stifled by the oppressive control of the LTTE on the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. The Foreign Minister expressed his confidence that this interactive dialogue with the Diaspora would develop into an inclusive process leading to sustainable peace and stability in Sri Lanka. He underscored the important role that the Diaspora has to play in addressing the current humanitarian situation in the North. He called upon them to add their voice to the growing chorus within the international community to exert pressure on the LTTE to free the helpless civilians who are being held hostage as human shields, confined to the fast receding sliver of land along the Mullativu coast, yet to be cleared. Minister Bogollagama emphasized the Government’s paramount concern for the safety and well being of the entrapped civilians. Sri Lanka is now on the verge of defeating terrorism and the time has arrived to look towards the future to re-establish democracy in the North and rebuild the infrastructure and facilities which have been destroyed. In this regard, he highlighted the re-establishment of the democratic institutions of governance which has now empowered the people of the Eastern Province, in tandem with the reconstruction and economic development. Minister Bogollagama pointed out that the LTTE committed its biggest blunder by rejecting the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987, and its violent and destructive opposition to the implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution has now led to the disastrous consequences it is now facing. The Minister of Constitutional Affairs and National Integration, D.E.W. Gunasekera, speaking on the occasion, highlighted the important measures undertaken by the Government to implement the Official Languages policy, including the mandatory requirement for all new entrants joining the public service with effect from 1st July 2007, to acquire proficiency in the two official languages within 5 years, in order to be eligible for confirmation in the service, as well as the financial incentives granted to encourage the drive to make the public service bilingual in the shortest possible time. He also said that the Government was endeavouring to develop a tri-lingual public service at the management level. The Minister of Science & Technology and Chairman of the All Party Representatives Committee, Prof. Tissa Vitharana described the political process underway to identify the areas for wider devolution of powers to the provinces, and expressed his confidence that President Mahinda Rajapaksa will be able to see through this difficult and challenging task. The Government has made this position known to the international community, which has also offered its encouragement. The Sri Lankan Diaspora delegation held wide-ranging and lengthy discussions, lasting for more than three and a half hours with Senior Adviser to the President, Parliamentarian Basil Rajapaksa today, during which a number of issues of concern to the delegation, including the current humanitarian situation in the North were addressed. During their stay in Sri Lanka, the delegation also had the opportunity to interact with leaders of major Tamil political parties, including TULF leader, V. Anandasangaree, EPDP leader, Minister Douglas Devananda, Minister Vinayagamoorty Muralitharan, PLOTE leader, D. Siddharthan and TELO leader, N. Srikantha. During the deliberations, the participants belonging to the Sri Lankan Diaspora stated that their primary mission was to engage the Sri Lankan Government and pointed out that the habit of blaming the Sinhalese or Tamils for the conflict was futile and the task at hand is to face the future. In this context, they outlined a two pronged approach namely, on the economic and political fronts. They emphasized the need to implement the economic programme which can be undertaken almost immediately by engaging with the Sri Lankan Government, while political issues, which would involve other communities as well, also needed to be addressed with equal priority. The Coordinator of the Tamil Diaspora for this dialogue, Dr. Noel Nadesan from Australia in his opening remarks observed that making peace is in fact more difficult than making war, but said that a start had to be made somewhere. He hoped that this interactive dialogue would be one of the many endeavours that would help draw a road map for all communities in Sri Lanka to co-exist in a non-violent environment. Apart from the presentations made by Ministers Prof. Tissa Vitharana and D.E.W. Gunasekera to the forum which was attended by 21 participants from 9 countries across the world, senior officials of the Government, including Secretary to the President, Lalith Weeratunga, Foreign Secretary, Dr Palitha Kohona, Secretary, Ministry of Justice & Law Reforms, Suhada Gamlath, Secretary, Ministry of Urban Development &Sacred Areas Development, Dr P. Ramanujam, Secretary, Ministry of Social Services & Social Welfare, Mrs V. Jegarajasingham, Central Bank Governor, Ajith Nivard Cabraal and Adviser to the President, Chandra Fernando also addressed the gathering. - Asian Tribune - Courtesy: Asiantribune.com