
Correcting misconceptions

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An interview with the Minister of Social Services Minister Douglas Devananda, who led the Sri Lankan delegation to the World Conference Against Racism last week, spoke to the Peace Secretariat about his trip. These are excerpts: It was a useful opportunity to explain the actual situation in Sri Lanka. At this critical juncture, we were able to make the international community understand what is really happening here. Many of the delegates stopped me in the lobby to express appreciation of my speech, and we had good responses at the bilateral meetings we had on the sidelines. They could understand that I have no reason to lie when I say that I feel we are on the right path. Although I am in the Government, I also represent my community. And I am a pioneer of the armed struggle. I fought for Tamil rights, and sacrificed a lot in that struggle, so they were ready to listen to me. The LTTE is a terrorist organisation, and it must be handled as such. I do not oppose Prabhakaran because of some political disagreements. He is anti-human, and can only be dealt with in that context. He has killed so many people. Just as an example, there was my brother. The LTTE killed him because of me. Recently, Prabhakaran killed a human rights activist, Maheswary Velautham, as she visited her sick mother in Jaffna. She worked hard with me for Tamil people, so he assassinated her. Prabhakaran's real problem is that it would be difficult for him to survive in a democratic process. That is why he wants a piece of land, so that he can rule as a dictator. The LTTE must be dealt with in the way it understands. Tamil grievances have to be solved politically, and we have already started on this process. I have proposed that we take a practical approach, properly implementing what we have in our Constitution, and then moving from there. That means we start with the Provincial Councils, and we have already had elections in the East. Then we should look into which issues currently on the concurrent list or held by the centre could be handed over to the Provincial Councils. This will convince Tamil people that we are able to sort things out democratically, while reassuring Sinhala people that devolution of power will bring people closer rather than lead to separation. We can move beyond the present Constitution later if it seems necessary. In the North, we hope to go for local government elections within two months. The Provincial Council may come by the end of the year. If I am elected, I can achieve many important things straight away. Again, it will have to be done in stages. We must start by restoring the freedom to live, then freedom of speech, freedom of movement and the freedom to work. We must look after the IDPs, then organise rehabilitation, resettlement and also development. There are more than 800,000 Tamils in the diaspora. They have been contributing at least \$20 per month, which amounts to many crores. The LTTE has in fact collected far more than this simply for destruction. We will collect for construction. I announced my visit to Geneva in advance, and I have been receiving many calls during my stay. Our people will help. Now they can be positive. Courtesy: SCOPP