
Lanka to engage opposing nations

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FM says EU resolution at UNHRC has adverse elements. Insists Lanka cannot be put before criminal court
By Dianne Silva
The government has decided to engage with the countries which voted against the resolution on "Assistance to Sri Lanka in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights," at the special session on Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

A foreign ministry official speaking to Daily Mirror last night said that the engagement would take place at diplomatic level in Sri Lanka and through the missions in the respective countries. Meanwhile, speaking to reporters in Colombo yesterday, Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama said: "As the foreign minister I will work towards explaining to them that Sri Lanka stands for Human Rights, democracy and the eradication of terrorism". Mr. Bogollagama said that Sri Lanka's victory at the Human Rights Council in Geneva was evidence that the international community had faith in Sri Lanka's agenda for protecting and promoting Human Rights. The foreign minister expressed his appreciation of the 29 states that voted for the resolution and the six other states -- Argentina, Gabon, Japan, Mauritius, the Republic of Korea, and the Ukraine -- which took a neutral stance. He explained that the parties which had abstained from voting did so because they had initially helped bring in the European Union (EU) led series of amendments. Thus, their refraining from voting showed the strength of the Lankan resolution: "The fact that these nations changed their minds and took a middle view is a great victory," he said. Mr. Bogollagama explained that the resolution on Sri Lanka by the EU had "adverse elements which would hinder the future Sri Lankan agenda and an investigative element which we would not allow." However, he said, the resolution put forward by Sri Lanka, which was adopted with amendments, gave the international community open access in areas they were looking for and was committed to human rights. Asked about the consequences to the country had the resolution not been passed, the minister said: "We were hopeful of it passing, because we have kept close relations with the international community and have a good standing with them. Therefore we were confident of it being passed." Mr. Bogollagama added that Sri Lanka could not be taken to the International Criminal Court because Sri Lanka did not fit the definition set out by the ICC with regard to war crimes: "I have said this before; the ICC cannot charge us with war crimes because we are a sovereign nation operating in the realm of democracy" he said. He said that Sri Lanka was not isolated in the international arena: "This (the outcome of the UNHRC session) comes at an opportune moment when many have tried to undermine the Sri Lankan effort and indicate that we were isolated by the international community," he said. He said the various international delegations that had visited the country and the visit of the United Nations secretary general had resulted in reports of the international community's approval of our activities. In the resolution on Assistance to Sri Lanka in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, adopted by a vote of 29 for and 12 against, with 6 abstentions, the Council welcomed the resolve of the Sri Lankan authorities to begin a broader dialogue with all parties in order to enhance the process of political settlement and to bring about lasting peace and development in Sri Lanka, based on consensus among, and respect for, the rights of all ethnic and religious groups inhabiting it; and urged the international community to cooperate with the Government of Sri Lanka in the reconstruction efforts, including by increasing the provision of financial assistance, including official development assistance, to help the country fight poverty and underdevelopment and continue to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. It also commended the measures taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to address the urgent needs of the internally displaced persons; welcomed the continued commitment of Sri Lanka to the promotion and protection of all human rights, and encouraged it to continue to uphold its human rights obligations and the norms of international human rights law. Courtesy: dailymirror.lk