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## Prof. Wijesinha responds to Toronto Star's Coverage on Bob Rae Entry Denial

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Secretary General Prof Rajiva Wijesinha has written to The Toronto Star in response to its coverage of the decision to prevent Canadian politician Bob Rae from entering Sri Lanka last week. His letter is carried below.

Michael Cooke, Editor, The Toronto Star Dear Sir A recent article in your columns suggested that a letter from Irangani de Silva, the former head of the Sri Lanka United National Association of Canada (SLUNA), may have contributed to the decision to bar the Canadian politician Bob Rae from entering Sri Lanka. In suggesting that Ms de Silva has 'a grudge against the federal Liberal party', the paper fails to actually consider the reasons Ms de Silva gave for asking that Mr Rae not be permitted to enter Sri Lanka. I myself have always believed that the more people who visit this country, and see the positive efforts we are making, the less prejudice there will be against us. However I have realized that there are some people who will insist on being critical, because their preconceptions, or else their political agendas, are just too overwhelming to be affected by any facts. Thus, while we found the British MPs who visited declaring that things were better than they expected, and the British Deputy Minister Mike Foster was also quite positive, Foreign Minister David Miliband continued on his blindly critical course despite all he saw and heard. We do not know whether Bob Rae would have been like that, but I can quite understand why Ms de Silva had no doubt that his visit would simply enhance his determination to attack. Though initially I am sure that Mr Rae's interest in Sri Lanka was idealistic, based on his penchant for federalism, which he thought the panacea for all Sri Lanka's ills, when he found a less malleable Sri Lankan government he turned rabid in his critiques. In February this year, following an article he wrote that was full of falsehoods, I wrote a response entitled 'The devious self-righteousness of Bobby Rae', which spelled out exactly how fraudulent were his arguments. To quote a single paragraph from it – 'Rae does record that the 'Tigers were ruthless at killing their opponents in their own community' and that they 'use suicide bombers against civilians and recruit children into their army' but he promptly goes on to claim some sort of justification for them in terms of their 'support around the world'. He privileges this by talking about 'the sense of the Tamil people that they have never been able to find justice inside a failed state', as though to uphold himself the idea that Sri Lanka is a failed state. The article may now be read in full on the Online version of the London Free Press at [http://www.lfpress.ca/cgi-bin/publish.cgi?s\\_keywords=wijesinha&s\\_topic=&s=le](http://www.lfpress.ca/cgi-bin/publish.cgi?s_keywords=wijesinha&s_topic=&s=le).

Bob Rae does not seem to have changed in the interval. Ms de Silva's letter referred to his demanding a probe into 'an estimated 20,000 civilian deaths', which is nonsensical. For a member of parliament to make such claims on the basis of the extrapolations of a newspaper that has been obviously biased against Sri Lanka is at best irresponsible, and fully justifies Ms de Silva's plea that he not be allowed to enter Sri Lanka. Her assumption was that he would use his visit to claim authority for further exaggerations, and his record suggests that this was possible. Following the article, I have been told of Canadians that Rae's interest in Sri Lanka is based on political self interest and, while he sees himself as the moral arbiter of Sri Lankan actions, he did not intervene when a temple in Toronto was bombed, a restaurant was destroyed, and the lives of thousands of Canadians were inconvenienced for weeks when the main traffic arteries of Toronto were blocked by terrorists and their children in repetition of the manner in which the LTTE used children for their goals.

I was also informed, perhaps in the belief that as the former Leader of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka I might otherwise be sympathetic to a Liberal, that Rae had been a member of the New Democratic Party, and had only jumped to the Liberals when it became clear that his premiership of Ontario had been a disaster, and he needed a new party if his political career were to continue. Oddly enough this was the second Canadian politician opposed to the Sri Lankan position I had come across who had jumped parties. Still, Rae is now a highly regarded figure in the Canadian Liberal Party and we should clearly engage with him in an attempt to cure him of his prejudices. I would assume that should initially have been done in Canada, and presumably our Mission in Canada, knowing his record, had engaged with him and tried to ensure that he would come with an open mind before they issued him with a visa. Certainly our Consul in Toronto, who has engaged actively with the diaspora as well as the Canadian media, would have been able to gauge accurately his position, and could have advised both the High Commission, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Colombo about the situation.

While all that was taking place, Ms de Silva was certainly entitled to put forward her point of view, and the authorities in Sri Lanka were also obliged to take it seriously, and set it against any other information they might have had on Rae from official sources in Canada. Given the damage done by those who pronounce on Sri Lanka on the basis of what they present as eye witness understanding, we need obviously to be careful in the present context, given the demands being made to destabilize the situation, demands pressed assiduously by the rump of the Tigers whose capacity to lobby people like Rae cannot be doubted. Prof Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process