
Canada offers to partner Sri Lanka in Post Conflict Development

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Acknowledging that Sri Lanka had gone through an extremely difficult period of grappling with terrorism for nearly three decades, Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada pledged that Canada will be partners in this country's post conflict development, when he met Rohitha Bogollagama, Minister of Foreign Affairs recently.

Obhrai recalled that it was the incumbent Canadian Government that proscribed the LTTE and pointed out that since stringent rules are in place in this regard which the diaspora has been sensitized to interface with this organization would result in punitive action. He recalled the manner in which the Members of the Canadian Parliament refused to meet with the demonstrators who blatantly exhibited insignia of the proscribed organization. Obhrai observed that such action demonstrated Canada's commitment to Sri Lanka's fight against terrorism. Focusing on bilateral issues, Foreign Minister Bogollagama acknowledged the strong partnership that exists between Sri Lanka and Canada reaching back several decades, complemented through engagement with the Commonwealth and the Colombo Plan. While appreciating Canada's support to defeat terrorism in Sri Lanka, he pointed out the need in bringing about a greater degree of cooperation between the two countries. The Minister also expressed appreciation for Canada's development aid to Sri Lanka. Parliamentary Secretary Obhrai stated that following the visit to the IDP camps and the discussions held with Sri Lankan officials and other agencies he had been able to get a better understanding about the ground situation in Sri Lanka. He observed that the IDP facilities are fulfilling the needs and noted that the process of improving the conditions were ongoing. He opined that the resettlement of the displaced at the earliest would positively contribute to the reconciliation process. The Foreign Minister explained that the Government of Sri Lanka is investing heavily in the north to rebuild infrastructure and carry out de-mining to enable the displaced to return to their original habitat. He explained that areas such as Jaffna had been untouched by the recent fighting with residents there leading normal lives, and the rest of that region also will soon experience extensive rebuilding and resettlement. Minister Bogollagama recounted the magnitude of the welfare being provided by the Government in terms of shelter, food and healthcare to the displaced, and underscored its adherence to the 180 day accelerated program of resettlement. Obhrai added that Canada's aid programmes will continue to assist the civilians who are rebuilding their lives. Foreign Minister Bogollagama outlined the ongoing political process and the need to engage all political parties in the reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka. He elaborated that the civilians in the north will be able to re-enter the democratic process that has been denied to them for a long time with their participation in the forthcoming local government polls. The Minister informed that political empowerment is an important component of the reconciliation package. He emphasized that the displaced in the welfare villages will also be able to exercise their franchise. They exchanged views on the envisaged framework for the devolution of power for the provinces. Parliamentary Secretary Obhrai said that in his discussions with the Sri Lankan diaspora in Canada has been on the basis that they should be engaging with the Government of Sri Lanka. Minister Bogollagama informed him that a diaspora dialogue had been initiated since March of this year and the Government looks forward to an expanded participation and discussion at the next meeting especially since the conducive environment for the growth of democratic institutions is presently underway. He explained that with the defeat of the LTTE, the political space had been created for the implementation of the devolution of power that was enshrined in the Constitution by the 13th Amendment. Obhrai undertook to take back a message of hope to the diaspora in Canada that they now have the opportunity to engage in the developments taking place in Sri Lanka. Obhrai invited Minister Bogollagama to visit Canada in the near future to continue the bilateral engagements with his Canadian counterpart which will contribute to the strengthening of the relations between the two countries. During his visit to the IDP welfare villages, Obhrai had access to ascertain the welfare of some Canadian citizens in the centres. He also held discussions with Abdul Risath Bathiyutheen, Minister of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services and Palitha Kohona, Secretary, Foreign Affairs earlier in the day.

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