
Sri Lanka's Post Conflict Agenda to empower our people: Minister Bogollagama

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Mr. Rohitha Bogollagama Minister of Foreign Affairs delivered a speech at the Prestigious China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) in Beijing on 02nd July 2007 on the topic "Post ‐ Conflict Sri Lanka and the way forward" Full text of the speech delivered by Rohitha Bogollagama, at the CIIS in Beijing on 2nd July 2009 is below, (July 16, Colombo, Sri Lanka Guardian) I am pleased to be at this prestigious Institute, the CIIS this afternoon to address this august gathering on the topic “ Post ‐ Conflict Sri Lanka and the way forward”. To place matters in perspective, I will focus initially on the pre-conflict scenario and then place it in terms of the post agenda that we are looking at. One of my predecessors who addressed this Institute was late Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, in 2005 July, I believe. By August 2005, he fell victim to the LTTE, when the LTTE assassinated him. That assassination symbolized the life we had in Sri Lanka, where life had no respect and was full of uncertainty, threatened by one of the most brutal terrorist organizations in the world. All of us shared those moments, but we were resilient. Our democracy survived with fortitude until President Mahinda Rajapaksa came to power in November 2005. We addressed this issue of terrorism both through negotiations and with military engagements. In the year 1985, we first started talking to the LTTE, formally and structurally, mediated by the Government of India. We had talks with the LTTE, in Thimpu, in Bhutan. The talks centered round the devolution of power, but the LTTE moved out of this. However the government of President Jayawardene, went ahead to implement the Indo- Lanka Accord that introduced the proposals for devolution of power to the periphery from the centre and the creation of the Provincial Councils in our country which got into the Constitution in terms of the 13th Amendment. We have this instrument well built into the Constitution but were unable to make truly operational in the north and the east of Sri Lanka, because of the resistance and the presence of the LTTE, seeking a separate State, advocating terrorism, extremism, and Sri Lanka was not ready in any manner to concede to any extremist forces. In the year 1971, we had an insurrection in the South through an extremist movement and the government had to step in and deal with it. Once again the insurrection emerged in 1988/89. There again the government stepped in and acted as it did in 1971. But the LTTE was different. Through its diaspora and the international presence, some key elements of the LTTE, and through their strong net-working overseas helped to sustain a movement, well funded through its illicit activities including arms smuggling and drug trafficking, to various other traits that they indulged in, to build up resources to procure arms. These arms landed in Sri Lanka through the open seas and gave them the strength to build up a virtual conventional army. Every successive government tried to negotiate with LTTE, from President Jayawardena to President Premadasa, to President Kumaratunga. President Premadasa was assassinated by the LTTE, while a near fatal attack was launched on President Kumaratunga who lost an eye in the process. Then came the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. We ourselves started talking with the LTTE. I was part of the negotiating team appointed by the President. At that time I was holding another portfolio. I went to Geneva to talk with the LTTE delegation. We had 02 rounds of talks lasting 06 days on both occasions, but nothing came out of it - because the LTTE moved out. They were seeking only for the control of the land and the land only. Previously in the year 2002, the Government at that time led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, entered into an agreement with the LTTE termed and conditioned as the CFA (Cease Fire Agreement) brokered and facilitated by the Norwegians and this agreement cited the LTTE as a party with certain rights. Certain areas were to be maintained by the LTTE in the North and in the East. The Sri Lanka military was not able to carry arms where the LTTE presence were concerned. To that extent our security was compromised. In spite of this ceasefire agreement, the LTTE continued to target civilians, members of the parliament and other establishments of the government, politicians including the then Foreign Minister Laxshman Kadirgamar, who was assassinated in 2005. All these took place during the validity of the Ceasefire Agreement. A total of 740 civilian killings by the LTTE took place. In spite of that in November, President Mahinda Rajapaksa, thought it best that we talked with the LTTE, for a negotiated settlement within the framework of the “Mahinda Chinthana” the manifesto of our President. This is how we once again began to talk with the LTTE, from August to October 2002. The LTTE skipped talks in the last attempt and resorted to threatening the lives of our people blocking the Mavilaru Anicut. This led to a total military commitment towards securing the areas that were controlled by the LTTE, for the safety of our people. Then the military started moving into other parts of the East. We moved into the East and cleared the LTTE totally eliminating the presence of the LTTE from the eastern province of Sri Lanka and in a period as short as two years we launched major developments work. We want to replicate it in the North, with the same success that we achieved in the East. The East today has had the Provincial Council elections and a Provincial Council administration was set up within a span of less than two years. Lots of people, both in the country and outside Sri Lanka thought that it is not possible for us to counter terrorism totally and comprehensively in our country. Yet we eliminated the presence of the LTTE in Sri Lanka totally. Our President was committed to one agenda; that being the elimination of terrorism. That is how we engaged in the north. Of course it was a military operation but with a humanitarian objective to rescue the people that were entrapped and being held hostage by the LTTE. Many newspaper reports were carried and you would have heard before my speaking here, that 300,000 civilians were held hostage by the LTTE in an area of around 6 sq.kms. without water, sanitation and even food. The Government however kept supplying the people with food escorted by the ICRC in spite of the heavy presence of the LTTE. Such was our concern for the welfare of our Tamil brethren. The final engagement lasted intensively for about two months. May 19th 2009 dawned with our victory over terrorism, where we witnessed the fall of the LTTE, the death of Prabakaran and the total elimination of the LTTE, as a terrorist movement in Sri Lanka. It took 30 years and 05 successive governments to complete the fight against terrorism were worked out. We have today cleared the country in its entirety. Before that the LTTE, virtually claimed 1/3 of the land and 2/3 of the coastal belt of Sri Lanka. The LTTE, during his reign of terror was able to as part of their strategy, eliminate every possible voice of dissent, including Tamils. They had no respect towards a pluralistic

society. They killed every single Tamil democratic leader who emerged in the north and the east. Those Tamils who survived, escaped and lived either in Colombo or overseas. There is one politician who survived 13 attempts of the LTTE and is in the present Cabinet with me. That is Minister Douglas Devananda, the leader of the EPDP. Today, we see the first phase of our post conflict development. This is associated with the liberty that has been got and the freedom the people are enjoying. The 285,000 people who were held as human shields and who were ousted from their original places are under the care of the government. Today our Tamil people are living in temporary villages set up by the government, assisted by many countries including that of the People's Republic of China. I greatly appreciate all the support that has been extended in the post conflict scenario in Sri Lanka, by your great country, since, they are living with a feeling of freedom and they are no longer under the clutches of the LTTE. They can see their children growing now. Earlier their children were snatched by the LTTE and were made child soldiers. These youth are now enjoying for the first time in their entire lives, the winds of freedom without wearing a cyanide capsule around their neck. That is the experience and the trauma this civilian population experienced in the hands of the LTTE. This is how we brought Sri Lanka forward, in spite of the threats and attacks by the LTTE. We continued to remain as a vibrant democracy, elections were being held and our governments were changed by people's will and most free and fair elections were held in terms of any accepted norms. Today it is possible for us to have in our society, an inclusive process of political development and to share our resources with equal opportunities for the people and to bring stability to an economy that is growing at around 6% at an average within the last 5 years. We are also working in terms of our drive to address the political empowerment of all regions, not just in one area, but in the country as a whole. This political empowerment was originally envisaged as far back as 1987, in the Indo- Lanka Accord. It is an agreement that was signed between India & Sri Lanka, with the devolution of power for the first time, creating provincial administrations, which has the power of legislation and executive authority led by the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers and legislators as provincial councilors having powers vested on them by the Centre by a list being detailed as the provincial list and some powers shared in terms of the concurrent list within the Centre and the Provinces. This has been in operation for 20 years with exception of the North and the East. In the North, devolution could not be practiced because of the presence of the LTTE. In the East, we could not have it because it was merged with the North up to the year 2007, as one province. Our resettlement process has several pre requisites; one is, that the conditions in the environment having to be secured including the clearing of areas, of land mines. Heavily mined areas are still found in the northern part of Sri Lanka, where the LTTE fortified their installations. In certain areas we have unearthed as much as 90,000 land mines. The process is continuing. There is international assistance that has come and we are seeking further assistance in order to expedite the process. We have the manpower. We have announced a road map of 180 days. This road map carries the requirements for the resettlement, Infrastructure to be laid including water and other services, electricity included and the housing being provided for the IDPs. Our desire is to see that the North returns to total production and people are free in their own homes and their villages. We are confident of reaching this goal from the experience, we so far had in the Eastern Province. Civilians are in the IDP camps, are being provided with all amenities including for food and clothing and education. All these are being provided by the State. The State is assisted through various INGOs and NGOs in the country and this again has helped us to augment and supplement some of the services. We are also looking at the post conflict agenda, in terms of empowering in our people. As I said, through the political process, being the devolution of power and simultaneously through the decentralization of economic activities, which would take the drive forward with industrialization. Industries have been hitherto confined to the western part of Sri Lanka heavily and the spread of these industries to provinces is something we have now recognized as vital in the industrialization. President Mahinda Rajapaksa, has declared the industrialization of all rural parts of Sri Lanka as a foremost objective. We need FTZs, we need economic agencies to drive these Economic empowerment for livelihood opportunities. We would encourage private sector orientations, in terms of greater presence in the rural sector and above all, a state policy that would encourage and give incentives to those who are now getting located in the regional parts of Sri Lanka. This includes the Northern part which contributed less than 1% of the GDP in all these years, as there was no activities other than just basic and primitive rural and agricultural activities. In the Eastern part, the contribution to the GDP is around 3%. The government has a major thrust in focusing on generating wider activities in several fields including fisheries for the first time after 30 years. The seas surrounding Sri Lanka have been freed for the fishermen to have access without any restrictions. All these years we had restrictions of access for reasons of security. Now fishermen have free access and that will generate wider development in the fisheries sector both for local consumption and for export. Agriculture will have greater investment being made by the State and the private sector at both pre-harvest and post harvest levels and the quality of production is expected to improve. By engaging in these activities we expect to increase economic empowerment of the people in the North of Sri Lanka. Infrastructure development in these areas are being handled in an expeditious manner and the road network is getting fast connected. The railway line that was disrupted, is now been further improved and connected with the South and the harbours that were closed due to terrorist activities have started opening and the cement factories that were famous in the North have now started once again and are looking for investors. We need to look at all these activities in the Northern part of Sri Lanka, to achieve a major thrust in economic development for the reconciliation process to be meaningful as a whole. It is this reconciliation process that we lacked in the past. In the post conflict scenario, it is also important to achieve a meaningful reconciliation process to overcome barriers and to see how to stabilize society, winning the hearts and minds, for one another to feel equal partners and seek opportunities together. The constitution of our country guarantees fundamental rights to all people, equal rights for all communities without discrimination what so ever in terms of caste, creed, race and for everybody to be live in any part of Sri Lanka and be employed without any restrictions. Liberties are guaranteed where one can invoke the jurisdiction of all the Supreme Courts in Sri Lanka as a matter of fundamental rights and as a matter of original jurisdiction. In spite of all these instruments and the legal systems being available, the LTTE was able to drive a wedge between the North and

that of the South. This is the device that has been eliminated along with the elimination of terrorism. Further, very meaningful steps have been taken by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, in seeing that when it comes to opportunities, we give more opportunities to people and we have to equip people to seek greater opportunities. Language was an issue. We spoke 02 languages in one country and there was a common language we found in English. Today people are learning both languages and there is a major drive in getting the public service of Sri Lanka to learn Tamil as a priority area of learning in terms of the language gap, to have more Tamil administrators that can serve in the North and the East in addition to the other parts of the country. Sri Lanka has been known as a travel destination throughout history that has a rich culture which goes to 2500 years. This is how we have come to share some of our historical developments with this great country the People's Republic of China. Historically we had very good relations and contemporarily we are looking forward for greater heights to be developed and greater cooperation in the international scene. Today whilst the conflict is over in Sri Lanka, we were able to address terrorism in the international platform, and get the acceptance of the international community and that of States on the need to counter terrorism, comprehensively. For this, we must acknowledge the support that we have received from the international community as we are now in the post conflict scenario. We received such support in several ways, beginning with the proscription of the LTTE that came from several countries including the USA, Canada, the 27 countries of the EU, India and the UK. In addition there has been support coming from lot of our friends in giving us moral and material support on the need to counter terrorism in Sri Lanka. This support is well recognized and appreciated. If not for the support that we received from the international community our tasks would have become much difficult because of the lack of hardware and the lack of support morally. Indian support is something that I must acknowledge. Our President repeatedly advocated that it is a political solution that lies to political problems and it is in that context, the post conflict scenario in Sri Lanka is being built by us in the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, in carrying this road map forward that has an inclusive agenda both politically economically and socially. As you all are aware, nowhere in the world can one have liberty without security. It is the need of any civilized society to have the correct elements of security in place. It is in that context, we look at the need for us to continue our security developments for our people so that people are protected. As a sovereign country we have the basic requirements to protect our territorial integrity and that of sovereignty. Liberties should not be practiced in the absence of the tools that could measure and protect the liberties that have been enjoyed by the people. The rule of law is an essential element in the practice of liberty. That is why we have. The judiciary is independent from that of the executive and the legislature. The appointments to the Supreme Court though made by the President, their removal is not possible by the appointing authority. Thereby the entire judicial system is administered by the judges and also their disciplinary control is exercised by the Judicial Service Commission, so that a judicial officer is responsible to maintain independence of the highest order and discharge his responsibilities and duties according to the law thereby upholding the legal system and protecting the subjects of our constitution. We also had a "zero civilian casualties regime" that we administered. We did not want any civilians to get hurt and that is why we had to advance inch by inch to take charge of the ultimate destination where the LTTE was holding the civilians. Having made this sacrifice we are today in the process of rehabilitating over 10,500 LTTE combatants and cadres that have surrendered to the military. This process is another part of our reconciliation drive, where the President has given high emphasis and priority to. Out of them currently we have got 795 child soldiers held by the LTTE, now being rehabilitated, assisted by the UNICEF and under the care of a special commissioner for rehabilitation appointed by the government. We propose extending this programme to include some of the minor offenders or perpetrators of crimes coming from the LTTE combatants and cadres, others will be dealt once the screening process and investigations are carried out according to our legal system. Rehabilitation would become as a priority because it includes the youth of our country to be brought to the correct stream and back to the society to be integrated as responsible and respected members of our civil society - a society they have never seen, a life that they have been denied and minds that have got distorted because of the indoctrination by the LTTE. We are also looking at a scenario, which is untold in terms of bringing the families back together. That is also important because when the families entered these IDP many were separated from other family members. In the reconciliation process, this too has become a priority that we are looking at. Thereby we bring an inclusive approach in the reconciliation process of Sri Lanka in the post conflict scenario. I will now talk in term of our engagements in the region. We look at the People's Republic of China as one of our closest friends and a relationship that has come to stay. The "One China Policy" that our government has maintained has remained as a cornerstone in terms of the relationship between P.R. China and Sri Lanka. We value the assistance that have been forthcoming from the People's Republic of China. The assistance that have been extended by Sri Lanka at the beginning including the Rubber Rice Pact in 1952, a strong barter agreement that developed into a good commercial instrument too at that time, will be recalled as an important link in terms of our commercial development. Today China caters in terms of SL's domestic needs, both in the consumer sector and the infrastructure development. Our trade has grown to 1.7 b US \$. Though the trade gap is wide we are not concerned because it cannot be matched easily in terms of bilateral trade dealings economy the size of P.R. China. We understand the differences and also how best the parity can be maintained. We have been always valuing the investment drive that has come for our infrastructure sector including the assistance that have been extended in the form of harbours and power stations and the other areas of infrastructure related development in Sri Lanka. We want to look at the region as the Chairman of the SAARC. Today Sri Lanka holds the Chair of the SAARC and again China remains an important Observer of the SAARC. We also share a common platform in the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO) in the form of a dialogue partner. We must thank P.R. China in extending that opportunity for Sri Lanka to join the SCO as an observer. At the same time we are part of the ARF and the ACD of which soon we will be taking the chair and will host the first ministerial meeting in Colombo in Oct. 2009. We are also looking at the BIMSTEC, another regional grouping, as an important economic grouping for us to connect SAARC and that of East Asia. The message I would like to convey at this forum today, is that our link with your great

country needs to be further expanded particularly in terms of empowering of our peoples in the years to come. I must thank the CIIS for the opportunity that has been extended to me to address this august assembly. Courtesy: srilankagaurdian.org