
Sri Lanka earned high praise from the chair at the retreat of the Asean Regional Forum

Friday, 24 July 2009

Last Updated Friday, 24 July 2009

Sri Lanka earned high praise from the chair at the retreat of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) for its positive contributions on the fight against terrorism. Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya who chaired the concluding session yesterday at the 16th ARF Conference in Phuket, Thailand extended high praise to Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama for his remarks that he said stood as a lesson for others faced with the same or similar problems. Strongly condemning the acts of terrorism committed in Jakarta recently Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the Foreign Minister of Indonesia and to Australia whose citizens fell victim to the bombings. Speaking at the retreat of the ASEAN Regional Forum the Foreign Minister conveyed his commiseration on behalf of the government and the people of Sri Lanka who had also being victims of terrorism for several years until the LTTE was defeated militarily two months ago. The full statement follows: Statement by Hon. Minister at 16th ASEAN Regional Forum, Phuket, Thailand 23rd July 2009

Chairman, His Excellency Kasit Piromya, Hon. Foreign Ministers, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Permit me at the outset to express my sincere appreciation to the Royal Thai Government and His Excellency Kasit Piromya Foreign Minister of Thailand for the warm welcome and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation. I also congratulate the Chair, for the excellent manner in which the 16th ARF has been organized in this beautiful city of Phuket and for its successful deliberations. The issues that confront us today are manifold. However, the most acute challenges that currently face our region are terrorism and the impact of the global financial crisis. Mr. Chairman, The threat posed by terrorism is one of the most serious challenges facing the international community today. With its global dimension and frightening innovations, a recurring nightmare for security authorities is the possibility of non state actors and terrorists acquiring WMDs or related material. As a country that has been affected by terrorism for several decades, Sri Lanka fully recognises the devastating impact on international peace and security, national security and the economy arising from terrorism. The economic impact of terrorist activity could be devastating. Unfortunately, in recent years, States have become increasingly vulnerable to terrorism. Simultaneously, concerns regarding nuclear proliferation, safety and security have increased worldwide. International initiatives aimed at combating these threats have to be a high priority. Sri Lanka supports multilateral, multi national and bilateral measures relating to issues of nuclear safety and security. Some of the instruments and arrangements to which Sri Lanka fully subscribes, such as UNSCR 1540 directly addresses this issue, while other older instruments are supportive of a broader framework of non proliferation. Sri Lanka will continue to support global measures to counter the scourge of terrorism, including the early conclusion of the Global Convention on Terrorism. In addition to subscribing to the UN Convention dealing with Terrorism, Sri Lanka is party to the NPT treaty and its related Safeguard Agreements as well as other related Agreements under the framework of the IAEA, such as the Convention on Nuclear Safety and the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident among others. We are partners in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism as well as in the Proliferation Security Initiative and its related activities. In the regional context, we are party to the SAARC Regional Convention on Terrorism and the SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in criminal matters. Under Sri Lanka's Chairmanship, the SAARC adopted the SAARC Ministerial Declaration on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism this year. We have taken a number of national legislative and other measures giving effect to these commitments, and the domestic legislation under the convention of the suppression of Nuclear Terrorism is under preparation. Ensuring maritime security is another dimension that has assumed importance, given the ability of terrorist movements to disrupt the free flow of track through the high seas. Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka has grappled with terrorism over the past 30 years, and recently being successful in defeating the LTTE, a terrorist group proscribed in over 30 democracies worldwide. Our experience has strengthened our resolve to support international efforts to combat this dangerous scourge in its entire dimension. We fully acknowledge that terrorism is not a problem limited to individual states. It is a global problem that needs to be addressed through common action. Mr. Chairman, I have no doubt that Sri Lanka will enter the annals of history as a classic text book example of a nation that successfully prevailed over terrorism, while upholding the cherished values of democracy and human rights. The resounding success of this campaign is to the credit of President Mahinda Rajapaksa who provided effective and decisive leadership to the military establishment in his capacity as Commander in Chief of the armed forces. His foresight in sustaining broad based popular support for the military campaign and his engagement with the public for wider consensus was evident from the beginning. The violence unleashed by the LTTE would never have grown into the dimensions that it eventually did, if not for a number of factors. The availability of millions of dollars through LTTE networks generated by an illicit arms trade and drug trafficking in international waters, commercial operations carried out by sections of the diaspora including illegal money transfers, international financial fraud and credit card scams, as well as extortion from the Tamil community. In conducting military operations to eliminate terrorism the primary concerns of the Government of Sri Lanka was to safeguard the innocent civilians, many of whom had experienced multiple displacements over the years, and had been forcibly conscripted by the LTTE to be used as human shields. Mr. Chairman, We have many challenges facing us in our post-conflict development phase. The rehabilitation and re-settlement of nearly 280,000 persons who were displaced by the conflict is one of our foremost priorities. Our goal is to quickly return the displaced to their homes and to restore their livelihoods. Demining with precede this exercise as well as the reconstruction of infrastructure facilities. The needs of the displaced are substantial, and we welcome and thank all our friends in the international community who have offered us assistance. The Government of Sri Lanka is also endeavouring to address the issue of family reunification. Children who were denied of their childhood are able to lead a more secured life today since there is no conscription by the LTTE. Facilities for education are available for the children, perhaps for the first time in their lives. The youth who were destined to be suicide cadres, have today, drescribed their deadly cyanide capsules and are awaiting to be rehabilitated. The post-conflict

phase is crucial in restoring confidence in people whose lives have been torn apart by this terrible conflict. Post conflict reconciliation also involves the reintegration of former combatants in to the political and economic mainstream of Sri Lanka. The post conflict period will focus on rehabilitation, resettlement, economic empowerment and holding of free and fair elections. Mr. Chairman, The elimination of the LTTE from Sri Lanka as a terror organization would prevent other facets of terrorism such as money laundering, narcotic trafficking, human smuggling, arms smuggling etc. from being manifested internationally. Dealing with terrorism, the way the Government of Sri Lanka has done, I believe, We will send strong signal to the international community that terror could be defeated and eliminated if there is a will to do so. Mr. Chairman, Countries hit by terrorism need strong support economically to sustain meaningful democracies. Mr. Chairman, In conclusion, I wish a successful conclusion to the 16th ARF where we will strive to make the challenges facing us into opportunities. Let us therefore collectively commit to work towards realizing our common aims to ensure the safety, security and economic advancement of our region as outlined in the ARF Vision Statement. Thank you.