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## International assistance should aim for tangible results: Minister Bogollagama

Saturday, 29 August 2009

Last Updated Saturday, 29 August 2009

International assistance to Sri Lanka should aim for tangible results with the benefits rapidly to reach the people at grassroot level emphasised Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama during his meeting yesterday (28/08/09) with Liam Fox, MP, Shadow Defence Secretary of the United Kingdom. Minister Bogollagama welcoming Dr. Fox on his second visit to Colombo this year thanked him for his continued interest in the developments in Sri Lanka, and outlined the steps being taken by the Government towards resettlement and reconstruction of the North.

Dr. Fox stated that Sri Lanka was at a historic juncture, with the defeat of terrorism paving the way for reconstruction, development and reconciliation in Sri Lanka, it has also provided an excellent opportunity for Sri Lanka to demonstrate globally the manner in which social and cultural reconciliation should take place. The British MP was of the view that only constructive involvement with the Government of Sri Lanka could help the victims of terrorism, while continued lecturing by some members of the international community benefited no one. Minister Bogollagama pointed out that Sri Lanka has appreciated constructive engagement. However it is unfortunate he said, that certain sectors of the international community still allows to be misled by the terrorist propaganda, while turning a blind eye to the developments on the provision of humanitarian assistance, reconstruction work and the reconciliation process being carried out by the Government to bring back normalcy to the lives of the people after three decades of terrorism. He explained that a recurring slogan of the terrorist propagandists is that the displaced persons are being held in 'internment camps' by the Government. The Foreign Minister elaborated on the absurdity of such propaganda citing the fact that the civilians rescued by the Government from the clutches of the terrorists and now residing in the welfare villages, have been praising the Government for liberating them from their sufferings. He also informed that the UN which is working in collaboration with the Government to provide humanitarian assistance to these people have acknowledged that they have adequate access to deliver their services to the people in these villages. The Minister also stated that with the progress in de-mining, 59,608 IDPs have already been resettled in the past few months and another 15,000 will be resettled soon; more than 10,228 seniors have been allowed to leave and further releases are anticipated in the near future after bona fides and capacities of prospective host families are established, he said. Minister Bogollagama further explained the need for meticulous screening of those in the welfare centers, as some would have vital information impinging on the security of the country and others who need rehabilitation having been involved in the terrorist movement. The Shadow Defence Secretary recalled that on his last visit to Sri Lanka in March 2009 he had visited Manik Farm and was astonished to learn from the children in the welfare village that most of them had not been to school for formal education and it was only there that they had begun schooling for the first time. This he stated was a clear demonstration of the challenges facing the Sri Lanka Government. The Foreign Minister informed that the challenges faced by the Government were magnified by issues such as that observed by Dr. Fox. It was not simply a matter of providing schools but trying to make up the years of education that they had lost due to terrorism, which required time, manpower and much financial support, he said. In this context, Dr. Fox reiterated his proposal of a 'Sri Lanka Construction Fund', made during his last visit to Sri Lanka in March 2009. The Fund would concentrate on economically empowering the people with the rapid channelling of funds to projects identified by the government that are not only of humanitarian value but also would benefit the future generations of Sri Lanka. Minister Bogollagama and Dr. Fox exchanged preliminary views on the envisaged modalities and framework for the proposed Fund. This Fund meant for reconstruction purposes, would seek also to procure contributions from the diaspora and would have transparent and independent governance. The Foreign Minister opined that the government of Sri Lanka merits the objectives and is in agreement with this initiative as it would empower the people economically which would contribute to sustained peace. Minister Bogollagama also informed Dr. Fox that in the international arena, Sri Lanka was moving forward. He referred to a number of international conferences being held in Sri Lanka together with many high level visits taking place. He referred to Sri Lanka being host to the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) in October this year. Dr. Fox also called on His Excellency the President and visited to Jaffna. Mr. Nivard Cabraal, Governor, Central Bank and Mrs. Kshenuka Senewiratne, Director General of the Foreign Ministry were also present at the meeting. Ministry of Foreign Affairs 28th August 2009