
Prof. Wijesinha responses to NGOs in debate on the Statement of the High Commissioner for HR

Friday, 18 September 2009

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Statement of Prof Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights responding to Non-Governmental Organizations in the debate on the Statement of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Sri Lanka regrets the intemperate attacks by some Non-Governmental Organizations on a country trying hard to recover from decades of terrorist activity, which had to be resisted within our legal framework. This is a difficult task, as all those engaged in fighting terror know, and we are proud that our record of success is better than that of most. However we recognize that there are problems and, as we indicated in our responses to the High Commissioner and to the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, we look forward to support in overcoming them. At the same time we would welcome recognition of positive developments, and hope that these will be taken further. Above all we deplore sleight of hand in describing the situation, so that facts are lost sight of in emotive rhetoric. Thus we felt that Human Rights Watch was once again up to its old tricks in making allegations of breaches of fundamental rights, when the basic problem is that of expediting releases and returns whilst also ensuring security. This is not easy and we welcome rational assistance, not attempts to stampede us. Thus, when people first started escaping from terrorist imprisonment, when we had to be doubly careful because of the continuing existence of terrorist networks that were regrettably encouraged by those who should have known better, we invited the Special Representative on the Rights of the Displaced, who issued a very helpful report. His recognition of the importance of security considerations, even while suggesting methods of expediting release, proved invaluable. We had long invited him for a return visit and he will be in Sri Lanka next week. We look forward to his comments on the systems we are putting in place for reducing numbers in the Welfare Centres. Though in the end we must make our own plans, since the security of our citizens is our responsibility, the advice of those who combine high commitment to principle with clear understanding of practical realities could prove invaluable. We hope too that consultations with the relevant authorities will make clear the seriousness of the problem of mines, which the LTTE strewed liberally in the period in which we had no control over certain areas. However, we will not be too hard on Human Rights Watch for struggling to open a stable door after the horse is already inside, since we should but sympathize with them after recent embarrassing revelations. Noting however that you cannot touch pitch without being defiled, we hope that a thorough investigation of its staff will ensure that those with dubious records will not continue to sully the name of a once distinguished institution. Again, we regret that a couple of organizations misinterpreted the High Commissioner's statement and gave a misleading reason for the sentencing of Mr Tissainayagam, whereas she had simply used a relative clause. We respect the High Commissioner's dismay in this regard, and the luxury she enjoys of critiquing our judiciary but, after the explanation of the Hon Attorney General, we are sorry that inaccurate reasons were adduced by Non-Governmental Organizations for a decision of our judiciary. The judicial process, as has been noted, is still open. 16th September 2009