No separate state, engage the government – Des Browne tells Tamil Diaspora

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(November 10, Canberra, Sri Lanka Guardian) Des Browne, the British Envoy to Sri Lanka, told the Tamil Diaspora in Australia that, after the comprehensive military victory, the only option available is to engage the government in working out a solution for the Tamils. In the open dialogue with the Tamil representatives he dismissed outright any possibility of the international community supporting a separate state. He told the Tamil Diaspora that big powers like Russia and China will be sympathetic to Sri Lanka as they have their own separatist problems.

This blunt message from Britain has dealt a hard blow at the current moves of the radical section of the Tamil diaspora to set up a Tamil Transnational government in exile. He met the representatives of the Tamil Diaspora at Westminster House, the residence of the British High Commissioner to Australia in Canberra on Saturday morning. Browne emphasized that the only leverage available to the West is the GSP+ but even that economic leverage should be handled with care. He added that he preferred to use it as a threat rather than enforcing it as it would affect the Sri Lankan people.The discussions centred on three main issues: 1) Humanitarian assistance: The pro-Tiger wing complained that the government is not treating the IDPs properly. They said that the IDPs re-settled in their new homes were not provided proper facilities to recover.Browne suggested they have been demanding and early release and the latest information to him was that nearly 100,000 have been re-settled with the relatives and carers. After that is done by the Sri Lankan government it is rather difficult to press for better conditions for the IDPs in their new homes. 2) Political process: Browne indicated that the West was keen on getting a reasonable response from the Tamil diaspora for the way forward. He said that he was prepared to be the facilitator to negotiate with the Sri Lankan government on the reasonable formula of the Tamil Diaspora. He emphasized that a separate state is not on the cards.3) Dealing with the past: Browne ruled out any possibility of going down the track of pursuing action on issues of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The pro-LTTE group raised the issue of dealing with these issues by an international court as in Kosovo. Browne argued that external intervention in Kosovo has not solved the problem. It has to be done internally and they favour the internal mechanism to an external intervention. The Tamil Diaspora representatives consisted of two wings:1) the pro-LTTE activists which were in the majority, and 2) the moderate wing which seeks to engage the Sri Lankan government in working out a formula for the future of the Tamils.The pro-LTTE wing emphasized that the Tamils will not get a fair deal now that the government has defeated the LTTE. Browne’s response was that they have to come down to the middle as they cannot expect to get all what they wanted under the present circumstances.Dr. Noel Nadesan, the Editor of The Uthayam, the leading Tamil community newspaper in Australia, representing the moderate wing, said that the Tamils are responsible for their present plight. It is the failure of the Tamil leadership that has driven the Tamils to this dead-end. He added that Sri Lanka, with all its imperfections, is a functioning democracy and, after the three insurrections in the north and the south, Sri Lanka has emerged as the best state that faced challenges to its nationhood. It still retains its democratic foundations and the only option available for the Tamils is to engage with the Sri Lankan government. The problem, however, is that there is no credible leadership left among the Tamils – thanks to the LTTE -- to negotiate with the government.Photo: Des Browne with the British High Commissioner (r) and some representatives of the Tamil Diaspora at Westminster House, Canberra. Dr. Nadesan then told Browne: “The friend of the West is Ranil. Why don’t’ you ask him to take part in the APRC and get involved in a bi-partisan approach to get the best deal for the Tamils? The history of the Tamils indicates that the Sinhala leadership too has played politics whenever one party tried to solve the problem.” The consensus of the moderate wing was that Ranil has to take the responsibility of rising above party politics and approach the problem in a non-partisan manner to develop a common solution to bring about a durable peace. -Sri Lanka GuardianCourtesy: srilankagaurdian.org