
STATEMENT ON THE EU DECISION FOR THE TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF THE GSP+ FACILITY TO SRI LANKA

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Responding to the EU's decision to temporarily suspend the GSP+ trade concessions to Sri Lanka in 6 months, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Colombo in a statement issued on 16 February 2010 said "Sri Lanka values her longstanding relations with the EU" and "will therefore continue her engagement with the EU in the upcoming 6 months with a view to sensitizing the European side through a constructive dialogue, concerning both the rapid, demonstrable and sustainable progress that has been gained since the end of the conflict situation, as well as the further steps that would be taken in that direction." The statement expressed confidence "that the EU and its Member States would, during the process of engagement, pay due attention to the manifold challenges yet faced by Sri Lanka" and was hopeful that this "would result in the timely reversal of the temporary suspension, thereby enabling the people of Sri Lanka to continue to draw on the GSP+ facility for their economic empowerment, including for the post-conflict recovery and rehabilitation of the North and of the East". Full text of the statement:

1. The European Union on 15th February announced the temporary suspension of the GSP+ trade concession to Sri Lanka. In its Press Release notifying of the decision, the Directorate General for Trade of the European Commission (EC) observed that "the suspension of the GSP+ benefits is temporary, as the overarching EU objective remains to use the GSP+ as an incentive to underpin improvements" and, "will only take effect in six months time". The Press Release went on to say that "once sufficient progress has been made, the Commission will propose to EU Member States that the decision taken today be reversed and the GSP+ benefits restored".

2. The Sri Lanka Government wishes to reiterate that it responsibly and diligently engaged with the EU on the GSP+ issue during a period of unprecedented turbulence, when the very existence of the nation was threatened by a severe terrorist onslaught. A series of high-level political consultations took place during that time, wherein several senior Ministers of the Sri Lanka Cabinet, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of International Trade, made it a point to share views with their counterparts, both in the EU Institutions as well as in the EU Member States.

3. The Sri Lanka Government's observations on the European Commission "Report on the Findings of the Investigation on the Effective Implementation of Certain Human Rights Conventions in Sri Lanka" forwarded to the EC in Brussels on 6th November 2009, spelt out in detail the constant measures adopted to safeguard human rights, while pointing to the progressive amelioration of the situation, with the end of LTTE terrorism. The observations also established that the action deemed necessary during this period was undertaken in full conformity with internationally accepted norms of jurisprudence and governance.

4. Sri Lanka values her longstanding relations with the EU. Sri Lanka will therefore continue her engagement with the EU in the upcoming 6 months with a view to sensitizing the European side through a constructive dialogue, concerning both the rapid, demonstrable and sustainable progress that has been gained since the end of the conflict situation, as well as the further steps that would be taken in that direction. In this context, the Sri Lanka Government wishes to point out that the purposefulness of such an engagement would be considerably heightened, if both parties were to act with sincerity and in a manner respectful of one another. The setting of unattainable targets and the shifting of goal posts will only hamper the efforts of the parties. The engagement will also need to be sensitive to the sovereign prerogative of the people of Sri Lanka, to chart their nation's course.

5. The Sri Lanka Government is confident that the EU and its Member States would, during the process of engagement, pay due attention to the manifold challenges yet faced by Sri Lanka, as a democracy that fought a decisive battle against terrorism. The Sri Lanka Government is hopeful that the unbroken engagement with the EU, would result in the timely reversal of the temporary suspension, thereby enabling the people of Sri Lanka to continue to draw on the GSP+ facility for their economic empowerment, including for the recovery of the North and of the East from the losses suffered due to terrorism. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Colombo 16 February 2010