
The 3rd Session of the Senior Officials' Meeting of the Sri Lanka – South Africa Partnership Forum

Monday, 18 October 2010

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The Third Session of the Senior Officials' Meeting of the Sri Lanka – South Africa Partnership Forum was concluded on the 12th October 2010 at the Cinnamon Lakeside in Colombo. Mr. Romesh Jayasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs led the Sri Lanka delegation while the South African delegation was led by Ambassador S. Ngombane, Deputy Director-General for Asia and Middle East of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa.

Having briefed the Forum on the achievements being made by the Government of Sri Lanka in the political and economic arenas since the end of conflict and eradication of terrorism in the country, Secretary Jayasinghe stated that this afforded an unprecedented opportunity for Sri Lanka to engage the international community confidently and advance its development agenda prudently while also taking practical steps towards national reconciliation and economic development. He indicated that the Sri Lanka side looked forward to broad-based bilateral cooperation with South Africa in its post conflict reconstruction and reconciliation process. Such an understanding and support was vital in further stabilizing peace and security and in taking forward sustainable economic development. He also recalled the solidarity and support demonstrated by Sri Lanka for the freedom struggle of the South African people during the Apartheid regime. Mutually supportive bilateral relations between the two countries would help unleash their potential to contribute more effectively to the economic advancement of their respective regions. Elaborating on the challenges faced by developing countries including Sri Lanka and South Africa in the contemporary world, Ambassador Ngombane stressed the need to work together in facing up to common challenges, thereby harnessing the potential for increased South-South Cooperation. He congratulated the Government of Sri Lanka on the conclusion of hostilities, stating that South Africa stood for the territorial sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka. He also welcomed the ongoing efforts in Sri Lanka towards achieving lasting reconciliation and political accommodation. Identifying the priorities of the Government of South Africa as the creation of decent jobs, education for all, improvement of health services, rural development, land reform and reducing crime, Ambassador Ngombane stressed that South Africa's engagement with Asia became more prominent due to common development challenges. Asia is now South Africa's second largest trading block, with South Africa's trade with Asia tripling in the past 15 years. Thus economic fortunes of Africa in general and South Africa in particular are thus inextricably linked to the economic development of Asia. The delegations agreed that increased people to people contact including through exchange of visits of cultural troupes, performing artists, and exponents of other forms of arts would facilitate further advancement of bilateral ties. The role of education in strengthening the capacity of people and developing human resources in developing countries was underscored by both delegations. It was agreed to explore collaboration in the education and higher education. It was emphasized that officials of both countries representing education and higher education sectors would meet in Colombo in first quarter of 2011 to finalize the MOU on education. Both sides discussed and shared information in the field of tourism. They noted that South Africa received nearly 9 million tourists in 2009 where the average duration of stay per tourist is around eight nights. In the case of Sri Lanka, it receives half a million tourists where the average duration of stay is about 9 nights. The main tourist attractions of South Africa are wild life, whereas Sri Lanka being an island, its main focus is beach tourism. In the case of Sri Lanka, there are 8 world heritage sites while South Africa has 7. Both sides discussed the possibility of enhanced cooperation on protection of Environment and Sustainable Development and the importance of preservation of fauna and flora for increased Eco-tourism in both countries. Expansion of trade ties, PTAs/ FTAs, export development, Investment Promotion and Protection etc. were also discussed. Cooperation between the two countries in the fields Civil Aviation, Science & Technology, Water Affairs, SME Sector and Agriculture were among other matters flagged for future cooperation. During the Forum a Memorandum of Understanding was concluded between the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the Durban Chamber of Commerce. The signing of the MoU signifies the potential for cooperation that exists between the private sectors for enhancement of trade between the two countries. Both sides expressed the view that to elevate the ongoing engagement to higher level of cooperation, a regular exchange of visits of higher officials of the governments of the two countries was imperative. It was agreed in this regard, that the Government of South Africa would invite the Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka to South Africa by early 2011. Such high level visits would provide an opportunity to conclude bilateral agreements on mutually beneficial areas, including the Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation. South African High Commissioner in Colombo, Madam B.M. Pheto; Director/ South Asia, Department of International Relations and Cooperation Ms. N. Human; Director, Department of Trade and Industry Mr. P. Mtsweni; Deputy Director, International Bilateral Relations, Department of Tourism Mr. S. Mukwevho, senior officials of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa and South African High Commission in Colombo were at the discussions. Senior officials of the Ministry of External Affairs and other line Ministries, Secretary General of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, and representatives from the Export Development Board (EDB), the Board of Investment (BOI), the Tea Board and the National Chamber of Commerce also participated in the forum. 12th October 2010 Colombo