
“Sri Lanka will look after its own, to the best of our ability”: Peace Chief

Wednesday, 17 September 2008

Last Updated Wednesday, 17 September 2008

Statement of Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, responding on behalf of Sri Lanka in the General Debate on “Human Rights situations that require the Council’s attention”. Sri Lanka is deeply touched by the concern expressed by countries of the European Union for the human rights situation in some countries in Asia and Africa. We hope that, with advances in globalization, such concern will soon be universal. As others here have pointed out, the moral stature this Council should command requires consistency. Though we know this is not easy, we hope all of us will strive to achieve it in time.

Sri Lanka also appreciated understanding of the fact that “internal conflict is a breeding ground for violations of human rights”. A more illuminating description might have been that terrorism breeds such violations, as indeed has been graphically illustrated in so many theatres recently. In this regard, it should be noted that internal conflict is less corrosive when democratic governments are mindful of the rights of their own citizens, on whose approval their mandates rest. Elsewhere, where there is no such sense of responsibility, and where “Othering” occurs, violations as we have seen can be worse. The same thing applies with regard to the work of humanitarian organizations. Much is made of the fact that Sri Lanka had to impose restrictions on international organizations for their own safety. Indeed, the pomposity of the pronouncements regarding the international community, can sometimes be painful. However, just yesterday, when the government guaranteed safe passage to NGOs to proceed to Kilinochchi, where the LTTE had its headquarters, they would not take the risk, claiming “and I quote ‘and’ ‘In these kind (sic) of situations the humanitarian agencies tend to err on the side of caution’. It will not surprise our friends in this august assembly that representatives of national NGOs did proceed, and of course, kept safe. The ICRC, we should note, has been asked to continue in place, and does so dutifully. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights In short, Mr. President, Sri Lanka will look after its own, to the best of our ability, and with the assistance of our friends who care about our people, including the dedicated workers of several UN agencies. Given the caution of the international NGOs, even when the government was able to offer safe passage, it is clear that the best assistance the international community can offer is to persuade the LTTE to let our people go, to the safety of government controlled areas from where - as UNHCR testified with regard to the Eastern Province last year - we can ensure return and restitution as soon as possible. Whilst most countries spoke with circumspection, and as conspicuously in the case of Japan with productive understanding, we regret the assertion of Ireland that the peace process has terminated. We have explained to the Irish Foreign Ministry in Dublin that the peace process continues, and that terrorism should not be rewarded by being treated as the sole arbiters of peace when other democratically pluralistic Tamils are keen on negotiations and a political solution. With regard to the aspersions cast on Sri Lanka by others, Mr. President, I have responded elsewhere. Here let me reiterate that it would help the work of this Council if those who spoke here in the spirit of finger pointing were required to register the sources of the funding they enjoy that facilitates and explains their performances. I am not talking of Amnesty International which, with a few aberrations, tries to fulfill its original ideals. But transparency in the case of more hysterical criticism of Sri Lanka would, Mr. President, soon make clear a situation that certainly requires the Council’s attention. Organizations that have not presented audited accounts for several years, where the treasurer has been dead from about the turn of the century, have every right to raise issues, but they should also make it clear from where they come, and where they are heading.