

Sri Lanka: European Parliament condemns

In its resolution on Sri Lanka, Parliament strongly welcomes the move by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to return to the negotiating table in February, and condemns, therefore, the LTTE's unilateral refusal to participate in the second round of negotiations in Geneva that were scheduled for April 2006. It urgently calls on the LTTE to resume peace negotiations with the Government of Sri Lanka without delay, to be prepared to decommission its weapons and to set the stage for a final political settlement of the conflict. It severely condemns the renewed campaign of attacks by the LTTE, the high level of human rights violations committed by both sides and the constant breaches of the ceasefire agreement.

MEPs deplore the gross violations of the Ceasefire Agreement by the LTTE through actions at sea, in particular the attack of 11 May on the Sri Lankan naval force, which resulted in many casualties and put SLMM monitors in grave danger. They call on the parties to the Ceasefire Agreement to ensure the security of the SLMM which is an unarmed body invited by both the Government and the LTTE to monitor the Ceasefire Agreement, in order to allow the mission to fulfil its mandate, and commend the contributing countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, for their invaluable work. They call on both the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka to refrain from further actions liable to jeopardise the peace process, and in particular attacks on civilians.

Parliament condemns the appalling abuse of children through the recruitment of child soldiers, which is a war crime, and calls on all rebel groups and notably the LTTE to stop this practice, to release those it holds and to make a declaration of principle not to recruit any children in the future. It urges the Government of Sri Lanka to put into place legal measures to prevent and criminalise the practice. MEPs recognise that the LTTE does not represent all the Tamil peoples of Sri Lanka and calls on the LTTE to allow for political pluralism and alternate democratic voices in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka which would secure the interests of all peoples and communities. It strongly condemns the particular repression against Tamil language press and Tamil organisations, and calls for a thorough investigation into the murders of Mayilvaganam Nimalarajan and Dharmeratnam Sivaram, as well as the two employees of the newspaper 'Uthayan'.

Parliament says Sri Lanka's recent election as a member of the UN Human Rights Council places an obligation on the government to manifest its commitment to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights. It welcomes the announcement of new members of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission and stresses the need for an effective independent investigation into all alleged human rights violations by security forces or armed groups, bringing the perpetrators to justice in accordance with international fair trial standards, and insists that all parties should subscribe to comprehensive human rights agreements as a key element of future peace negotiations.

MEPs urge both sides, as an immediate gesture of goodwill, to cease the use of anti-personnel landmines and to assist in their removal. To this end, the Government of Sri Lanka should set an example by signing the Ottawa Convention and the LTTE should sign the Geneva Call 'Deed of Commitment'.

Parliament is worried that a deal to share international aid has still not been implemented, and believes that aid sent to Sri Lanka by the EU, and other international donors, in response to the tsunami must benefit the victims of that disaster without regard for their ethnic or religious denomination. It is concerned about the distribution and use of tsunami funds, which have not had the expected impact on the everyday lives of the victims or on Sri Lanka's recovery. MEPs note that the political gridlock on the 'Post-Tsunami Operations Management Structure' has already delayed the release of a further € 50 million in aid, hindering reconstruction work in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

Parliament deplores the fact that the demands of heavy defence costs have for many years diverted resources away from urgently needed investments in economic and social infrastructure in Sri Lanka. Finally, it calls on the EU Member States to do everything in their capacity in order to stop all illegal attempts by the LTTE to uphold a system of forced taxation among sections of the Tamil community living in the European Union.