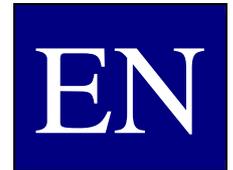




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 13 May 2009
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EU Troika visit to Sri Lanka 12-13 May 2009

A Vice Ministerial Troika from the European Union (EU) visited Sri Lanka, 12 - 13 May 2009, to discuss EU concerns about the current humanitarian and human rights situation in the country. The EU welcomes the opportunity provided by this visit for an open and frank dialogue. The EU is also grateful for the possibility afforded to see at first hand IDP facilities in Vavuniya.

The Troika was in Sri Lanka with a mandate from the 27 EU Member States to focus on the current humanitarian crisis.

The EU is deeply concerned about the high number of civilian casualties and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Northern Sri Lanka and reiterates its primary concern for the civilians in the conflict zone who are surviving under appalling conditions. The EU's second main concern is with access to the screening points and conditions in the holding centres for Internally Displaced People (IDPs). The EU reiterated the importance of the Government facilitating humanitarian access to civilians in need.

The EU recognises that the current crisis is approaching a final phase with the defeat of the LTTE militarily. The EU acknowledges the efforts and welcomes the commitments made by the Government in assisting its citizens that have escaped the conflict zone. The EU agrees that reaching a sustainable political settlement that meets the aspirations of all communities in Sri Lanka is essential for the future prosperity and long term development of the Island. The EU emphasises that winning the peace would be the real victory.

P R E S S

The LTTE is a terrorist organization that acts through violence and has been listed as such in the EU. The EU condemns unreservedly the LTTE's failure to release civilians under its control and repeats its call for the LTTE to lay down its arms.

As the legitimate authority, the Government of Sri Lanka has an obligation to protect all its own citizens. In particular, the EU reiterates its expectation that the Government will abide by its own commitment not to use heavy weapons in the conflict zone. The EU underscores that fighting terrorism must be done in full respect for the rule of law and Human Rights.

The EU and Sri Lanka have deep, long-standing relations, covering economic, trade, political and cultural matters. The EU is committed to maintaining these.

Concerning the EU's GSP+ special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance, the EU encourages Sri Lanka to cooperate in the currently ongoing investigation relating to its effective implementation of three UN Human Rights Conventions. This would enable Sri Lanka to present whatever information it considered relevant on the issues involved.

The EU took note of information provided by the Government on its ongoing actions to improve implementation of the three UN Conventions and address some of the concerns previously identified by the UN and others. A continued dialogue on these questions should be maintained.

Background

The EU "Troika" is made up of representatives from the current Presidency of the European Union (Czech Republic), the future presidency of the European Union (Sweden), the European Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. It carries a mandate to speak on behalf of all 27 EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

The Troika was led by H.E. Helena Bambasova, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic representing the current EU Presidency. The European Commission was represented by Karel Kovanda, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for External Relations. The EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy was represented by Boguslav Majewski, Head of Unit Asia/Oceania at the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. The incoming Swedish Presidency of the EU was represented by Carl Henrik Ehrenkrona, Director-General, Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The Troika was received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the Attorney General, the Minister of Export Development and International Trade, the Minister of Science and Technology and Chairman APRC, Advisor to the President Hon Basil Rajapaksa. The Troika also visited Batticaloa and IDP facilities in Vavuniya. It also met with representatives of civil society organisations..

The EU provides Sri Lanka with a very favourable range of support. On trade, Sri Lanka benefits from GSP+, giving the country duty free access to the EU which is the world's largest single market. Effective implementation of the three Conventions (the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child) forms part of the substantive trade preferences enjoyed by Sri Lanka in the EU market under this special incentive arrangement and whose positive contribution to Sri Lanka's economic and social development, the EU fully acknowledged and wished to maintain in the future.

An EU Declaration on Sri Lanka was approved on 24 April 2009 and Council Conclusions were adopted on Sri Lanka on 27 April 2009.