

Address  
by  
Hon. Rohitha Bogollagama, MP  
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on  
*Post Conflict Development:  
Efforts of a Democracy*  
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## POST CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT: Efforts of a democracy

Mr Chairman

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I thank you Mr Whalley for your kind words of introduction. I am delighted to have the opportunity once again to speak at the IISS. We hold in high esteem the work of IISS and consider it a privilege to be associated with your activities, in particular the Annual Shangri-La Dialogue which has become a global security summit with an extremely relevant agenda. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the support extended by IISS over the years to the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations & Strategic Studies in Colombo. May I also thank Dr John Chipman, Director General and Mr Rahul Chaudhury of IISS for inviting me here this afternoon.

Ladies & Gentlemen, Sri Lanka which has been known to travelers from Marco Polo to Ibn Batuta and Mark Twain as a resplendent island and a meeting point between east and west, has over the last 20 years been plagued by conflict in its northern and eastern provinces, due to the activities of a terrorist group, that has unleashed violence causing the death of over 60,000 people. We have faced terrible suicide bombings of civilian targets, assassination of political leaders including my own predecessor the late Lakshman Kadirgamar and former President Premadasa. The people of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka in particular, have been victims at the hands of this terrorist group, of brutal massacres, ethnic cleansing, child conscription and constant displacement. After nearly two decades, these terrorists who claim to represent the Tamil community have achieved nothing tangible to have their grievances addressed and only caused misery and hardship to the long suffering people of these areas.

Significantly in Sri Lanka today, Ladies and Gentlemen, over 53% of the Tamil population live in the south of the island side by side with the other communities clearly reflecting our multicultural society. Tamil is an official language in Sri Lanka and several of our captains of businesses, people at the pinnacle of their professions in the public and private sectors belong to the Tamil community. It is logical to then question as to why anyone would need to resort to such irrational violence in addressing any grievances this community is perceived to have? Furthermore, would this terror group's ideology and campaign for a separate state for the Tamils, who account for only 11% of the population, address that community's concerns, especially as it is not accepted as their sole representative?

Ladies and Gentlemen: there are those who talk of underlying causes of terrorism and thereby try to give these perpetrators of violence some respectability by

claiming they are fighting for a noble cause. Take for instance the issue of poverty. Now poverty by itself does not breed terrorism. The vast majority of the poor never resort to terrorism. Terrorists are those who exploit certain conditions. These conditions are part of the matrix out of which terrorism grows. It does not follow that terrorism is caused by these conditions. In a study by Krueger & Maleckova published by the University of Princeton, on "Does Poverty cause terrorism?", the report concludes that 'a careful review of the evidence provides little reason for optimism that a reduction in poverty would by itself reduce international terrorism'. You will recall the attackers of 9/11 were middle class and reasonably well educated, in no desperate circumstances.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is the sheer irrationality of terrorist violence which poses a considerable challenge to democracies, such as ours. We offer to negotiate, sit down at the table ready to discuss their grievances, but they, unilaterally suspend talks and return to violence, as they have used the negotiating period to regroup and re-arm. You enter into a ceasefire agreement but they violate it so many times, it ends up becoming a mere piece of paper. When one looks at the Northern Ireland peace process, one realises that despite the years of hostility, there was always that element of posturing on the political issues which was possible via Sinn Fein, eventually leading to the Good Friday Agreement. However, this is not a universal model. Experts on terrorism talk of corrigible and incorrigible terrorist groups. Actions of the LTTE, a terrorist group operating in Sri Lanka, as at present, lead them into the latter category. So what do we do?

Ladies and Gentlemen, in Northern Ireland at the height of the IRA insurgency, the UK government launched a massive border surveillance force, terrorist activists were arrested, interrogated and detained. Tough emergency laws were enacted, including the setting up of the non-jury Diplock Courts etc. You may recall the judgement of the European Court of Human rights in Dec. 1977 which ruled on the inhumane and degrading treatment of terrorist suspects by the police in Northern Ireland. Of course these measures have consequences for democracies such as ours. But what do we do when faced with an intransigent challenge? As democracies, we have a responsibility to protect our people from the clutches of terrorists, even if we sometimes have to err on the side of civil liberties. This may be an underlying reason for President Bush to recently clear water boarding as a form of interrogation of suspects. When confronted with a serial killer the first thing the police seek to do is to stop the violence. Attempting to find out the causes or circumstances that led to this person taking up serial killing comes later.

Ladies and Gentlemen: the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa took similarly a realistic approach after being elected to power in 2005. The President invited the LTTE to talks and concurrently convened an All Party Conference to search for a political solution to address legitimate grievances of the minority

communities in our country. But what happened? The LTTE came to the talks, refused to discuss core political issues as it did on all previous occasions starting from the Thimpu talks in 1985, and sought to posture on concessions that would be militarily favourable to their terrorist designs. They entered into a formal ceasefire in 2002, violated it over 6500 times. Previous ceasefires which have been entered into by them have ended with the LTTE reneging their undertaking by resorting to violent actions of a grave magnitude. In addition, they exploited the ceasefire agreement to infiltrate into the high security zones in the east, as they did in Sampur, and finally cut off the water supply to the villagers in that region. In the face of such naked violence against innocent civilians could we as a democratic government stand aside and watch our people being subjected to cruel and inhuman violence?

Ladies and Gentlemen. Our security forces had to act swiftly to clear the eastern province from the clutches of these terrorists. We did so with minimum civilian casualties and that too as collateral.

This brings me to the crux of my presentation this afternoon, how do we conduct ourselves once an area has been cleared of terrorist activity. We may call this post conflict peace building or development. Experiences in other parts of the world have shown, that even if a conflict ends with the signing of a peace agreement, rather than as a consequence of a military operation, as for instance it happened in Northern Ireland, Peace agreements do not resolve conflicts — at best they provide a framework, in which conflicting goals can be accommodated and pursued by means other than violence. So how do we proceed with post conflict development. One of the foremost tasks is, the restoration of law and order and an effective judicial system. Coupled with this, an inclusive and democratic political process including elections and the rebuilding of political institutions. Elections are often considered the key criterion for democracy and democratization and as such is synonymous with political liberalization. The primary task of the institutions set up, is to create conditions that are conducive to the success of a comprehensive programme of post conflict reconstruction.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a key component of post conflict development also includes the reintegration of former combatants and refugees into the economic process. Although addressing people's basic needs for food, shelter and medical care, the key challenge for governments and international donors is not to fall into the trap of making people dependent on aid. As soon as it is possible, funds should be channelled into programmes that enable economic recovery. To put it simply, post conflict societies benefit more from fishing rods than fish. Ladies and Gentlemen, let me share with you the experience of Sri Lanka, one of Asia's oldest democracies this process.

Today the clearance of the LTTE from the eastern province has enabled civilians in the east, who had been subjugated by this terror group, to enjoy the fruits of pluralistic democracy. The eastern province is a unique part of our country which is very ethnically diverse, with an almost equal percentage of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. The Govt. of President Mahinda Rajapaksa has now launched an ambitious rehabilitation, reconstruction and resettlement programme appropriately entitled 're-awakening of the east' with considerable allocation of funds from the national budget. Already a vast majority of internally displaced persons have been re-settled by the government with assistance from the UNHCR and other UN bodies, the ICRC and several INGOs as well.

A few weeks ago, Ladies and Gentlemen, we had local council elections in 9 local bodies with wide participation by political parties in the Batticaloa district in the east. The voter turnout was over 60%, demonstrating the enthusiasm of the people and 101 members being elected to local bodies. We are now preparing for the Provincial Council elections in May. The people are now able to elect their leaders after an absence of nearly 14 years.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are now seeking to attract investors and tourists, who will help create employment opportunities, and revive the economy in the eastern province. During the years of conflict there has been a decline in the traditional industries and economic activity in the east. This has been exacerbated with low levels of inward and foreign direct investment, resulting in high levels of unemployment. We are now in the throes of addressing these issues pragmatically. I must add here, that the international community must support more fully, the re-development programme in the east. It is true that several INGOs are substantially supporting the development programmes, but we need to move rapidly to ensure the people of this area, enjoy the peace dividend. Any financial support that is made conditional will only deprive the people of these areas from re-building their lost livelihoods.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a very significant aspect of this post conflict development programme is, that a breakaway group of the LTTE, chose to enter the democratic process by registering as a political party called the TMVP, and they contested the recent local council elections fairing extremely well. Of course the re-integration of a terrorist group into the democratic mainstream is a difficult task, as experts on post-conflict re-integration will acknowledge. This cohort of young men whose skill had primarily been handling weapons and engaging in criminal activities now need 'to turn their swords into plough shares'. They will have to learn what it means to accommodate others' views and work together. This is in our view will be a tremendous achievement in post conflict development, of which we take particular pride.

On the other hand, Ladies and Gentlemen, the LTTE which of course refuses to participate in democratic governance expectedly does not accommodate dissent, and will seek to eliminate this breakaway group while labelling it a proxy of the government. The LTTE's strategy of naming and shaming fits in with their design of silencing dissent. Therefore, security for elected representatives in the east remains a priority for the government. You will recall however, when the Good Friday agreement was negotiated in Belfast, the Sinn Fein position was that 'if decommissioning were a pre-condition to joining the executive that was something they could not accept'. However, decommissioning did materialise in that process and it is left to see if the LTTE would follow suit. As for the conduct in the local government elections, independent observers have emphasised that there was no evidence of intimidation of voters by this group. Elections were largely free and fair. Another significant aspect of this re-awakening process in the east, is the recent passing out of 175 Tamil police officers from the Police Training College in Kallaidy, Batticaloa. They will now be deployed in the east. Another 250 are to be recruited soon. You will recall that even in the Northern Ireland peace process, police reform was a significant aspect of the devolution process.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the government is taking action to devolve power under the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution which established the provincial councils. Although the Provincial Council system was introduced in 1987, the provisions of the act had not been fully implemented due to a lack of will by successive governments to meaningfully devolve power. However, President Rajapaksa who is committed to a political solution, sought to have at the least the APRC's recommendation on this system of devolution as an interim measure, and has even appointed a Cabinet Sub Committee to explore ways and means for the implementation of the provisions. Might I add here, that the Provincial Councils system in Sri Lanka provides for considerable devolution of power from the centre to the province, in areas such as education, health care, land distribution, roads and highways etc. This should give tremendous opportunity to the people living in these provinces who were disadvantaged. In devolving power we need to get away from nomenclature such as unitary, federal etc and focus more on devolution for development. Powers devolved should empower provincial bodies to initiate development programmes that directly benefit the people and the focus should shift away from text book models.

The APRC is continuing their deliberations on seeking cross party consensus on further devolution, which is another component of our democracy's post conflict development. I must seek to explain this process to you, Ladies and Gentlemen. Sri Lanka as a functioning democracy has a vibrant multi party system and elections are held on the basis of proportional representation. So as you are already aware, no government in power since the introduction of the 1978 constitution, has been able to obtain an absolute majority in parliament. Therefore, cross party consensus is

imperative to move forward on the devolution agenda. On the other hand, any devolution that is offered by steam rolling without wide consensus is unlikely to benefit the people.

The main reason why the provincial council system has not been fully implemented after over 20 years of its introduction, is because it was introduced under a cloud of controversy, and without wide discussion. President Rajapaksa has been wise and far sighted to realise this. Therefore, any attempt to rush through devolution proposals within a fixed time frame will be counter productive. It is important that the international community takes a realistic view of this situation and understands the ground realities, dictated considerably by political challenges. What is important is, the Government's commitment to the process of devolution, and those sincere friends of the international community, must assist objectively in manoeuvring the arduous path. The Government is confident that the day will soon dawn when the civilians in the districts of the Northern province will also be able to experience the pluralistic political culture that is being restored in the eastern province. It is towards this end, that the limited military operations are being conducted.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to those critics of the Government policy who argue that it is a military solution that is being pursued, — from what I have enumerated earlier, will exemplify the commitment to address the grievances of all minority communities in our country. However, this commitment to a political process does not imply appeasement of terror. I have just outlined to you how the clearance of the LTTE from the east is transforming the lives of people and restoring the democratic processes. At this point I wish to recall British Foreign Secretary Miliband, who a few days ago at the launch of the FCO's 2007 Human Rights report stated that, "military victories never provide solutions, but they can provide the space for political and economic solutions to be found. And without military power, the result can be more bloodshed." I believe this mirror images the Sri Lanka Government's policy on the conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen, whilst our government seeks to do its utmost to eliminate terrorism and ensure the well being of our people gravely affected by this menace, I wish to emphasise that the desire for peace is not solely on the part of the Government; it is the desire of the entire nation especially the many thousands of people caught up daily in the cross-fire of war. The Government therefore has the inherent right to protect and safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, and liberate the innocent peace loving Tamil people who have been held captive by the LTTE, and even been forced to part with their children, whom they forcibly conscript into their movement. The characteristic of the LTTE has been its unchanging agenda of totalitarian power, rejection of political pluralism and the rule of law, and its lack of concern for the people caught up in the conflict.

Contrary to the LTTE propaganda it is the government that provides and distributes food, medical aid, shelter, and education through our local authorities with the assistance of non-governmental organizations to all peoples in the north and east, and this too, despite numerous obstacles. It was not too long ago, that the LTTE attacked a privately owned ship which was unloading government food supplies at a harbour in the north. On another occasion they shut the entry points at Omanthai from where food convoys move into uncleared areas. This demonstrates the LTTE's callous disregard for the people in a region, they are fighting for supremacy. The government however, remains committed to protect its people, and keep hoping for that day, where the LTTE would renounce violence and enter the democratic path.

Ladies and Gentlemen, text book theories on negotiating peace cannot be applied arbitrarily. Sophisticated peace deals brokered by a most powerful world power the USA, such as the Norwegian initiated Oslo Agreement, between Israel's Labour government and the PLO leadership, carried all the classic features of an elite peace deal. However, it failed due to the absence of a political dialogue between the Likud and the Labour parties, and because core-issues were left to the final stage of negotiations; a very similar parallel to our 2002 CFA and talks which ensued. We all know the consequences

Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated and at the subsequent elections the Opposition party campaigning on an anti-peace platform came to power. Therefore violent conflicts such as ours cannot be resolved hastily. It is for this reason that President Mahinda Rajapaksa after his election to power in November 2005 summoned an All Party Conference to seek the views of all political parties with the view to developing a broad consensus on the devolution of power.

Ladies and Gentlemen, whatever steps are taken by our Government to seek to address the grievances of all communities, as has been outlined by me, it will be difficult to persuade the LTTE to transform itself into a political organization and seriously engage in negotiations as long as it continues to fundraise abroad. It is here that the role of the international community becomes crucial. The LTTE's criminal activity has transgressed our national boundaries. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London in its publication 'Military Balance' refers to commercial links between the LTTE and the al-Qaeda movement. In fact there is evidence that the LTTE established linkages with the Mujahiddins in Afghanistan as far back as 1987. There is further proof to establish that even in 2001 an LTTE delegation travelled to Kabul shortly before nine eleven. India's National Security Adviser in a speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy last year informed that both, Jihadi movements and the LTTE, were relying heavily on funds from trafficking in narcotics which has doubled in recent years.

The LTTE with its fleet of merchant vessels run by front organizations and established presence in the arms black market have been providing mercenary services, as well as training to several other terrorist groups around the world. It has pioneered the appalling art of suicide bombing long before the al-Qaeda movement. In fact the al-Qaeda attack on the 'USS Cole' in Yemen in October 2000 bore identical resemblance to the LTTE attack on a Sri Lankan naval vessel off the northern coast of Sri Lanka two months before. The precision and targeting of the hull by al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen was almost identical to the strategy used by the LTTE sea tigers in that incident.

In countries such as the UK, Ladies and Gentlemen, where the LTTE raises a bulk of its finances, the fundraising has graduated from mere extortion from the Tamil diaspora and cultural and charity events to commercial activities. Its links to telecom services through preferred calling cards, credit card frauds especially at petrol stations and news agencies run by their operatives, money transfer agencies, registered charities and companies that operate under various deceptive names are being investigated. The magnitude of the LTTE's fund collection is evidenced in Jane's Intelligence Review where it reported that the LTTE makes US\$ 70 million profit per annum. The very fact of its air capability with two light aircrafts and a glider which have been used for attacking government installations, demonstrates the solvency of this terror group.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our government remains strongly committed to bring peace and stability to Sri Lanka which is so vital for our economic growth. We have been viewed as country with tremendous potential for rapid growth and development. Despite the conflict our economy has grown steadily and maintained a growth rate of over 6% during the last five years. The end of this senseless conflict could give tremendous opportunities. Currently the per capita income in the district of Colombo is, 7 times what it is in some of the remoter regions including the north and east. We are confident that the eastern province will now begin to reap the fruits of rapid economic growth and seek to bring a better balance of the region's per capita. Ladies and Gentlemen: At the same time we need to appreciate the ground realities that democracies have to face in implementing changes, be they constitutional amendments or most simple development programmes. In a democracy such as ours with a system of proportional representation which does not give any one political party a clear majority the task is fraught with difficulties. Building cross party consensus particularly in the more volatile political environment in our part of the world is no easy task. When the Good Friday agreement was signed, the UK government at the time had the clear support of the opposition as we all know. They viewed the whole issue as a national priority, rather than from a politically partisan position. This is not how it always works for us and this has to be taken into account. So, we should not be unrealistic in our expectations of change overnight. As a democracy we have certain limitations. We cannot steam role to ushering changes.

What I have tried to outline to you are the efforts we in Sri Lanka have made as a democracy, notwithstanding these constraints to bring the dividend of peace to our people. It is important that the international community takes cognizance of these challenges faced by democracies such as ours.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will conclude by thanking IISS for the invitation extended to me and hope to interact with you for the remainder of this session.