

CONSOLIDATION OF CEASEFIRE TOP PRIORITY, SRI LANKA MONITORING MISSION TO BE STRENGTHEN PRESS RELEASE 21 March 2003

Sri Lanka Peace Talks – Agreed Statement on behalf of the Parties 21 March 2003

The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) held the sixth session of peace talks at Hakone, Japan from 18 to 21 March 2003.

The parties met amid growing security concerns following recent incidents on land and at sea. While they acknowledged that parallel progress is needed in negotiations on security, economic and political issues, the parties left no doubt that they much now give top priority to improving the security situation, in particular at sea. The parties undertook to enforce better compliance with the Ceasefire Agreement by their personnel.

The Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE are deeply concerned about the latest incidents at sea, including on 10 March. To prevent future incidents at sea that could threaten stability of the ceasefire, the parties have agreed to convene senior naval and political representatives from both sides within three weeks to work out effective arrangements for the operation of naval units in keeping with existing treaty obligations. The meeting will be convened by the Royal Norwegian Government and the Head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and will immediately start preparing the meeting with military leaders on both sides. The parties agreed to instruct their naval units to exercise restraint, as required by the Ceasefire Agreement, and to avoid provocative actions in the crucial period prior to the establishment of appropriate procedures.

In this context, the parties agreed to strengthen the mandate and capacity of the SLMM [Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission] to undertake preventative measure to avoid serious incidents at sea and on land. As a fundamental precondition for the SLMM to take on a stronger role, the parties pledged to ensure full compliance with the rulings of the SLMM, guarantee the security of its personnel in all situations, and take disciplinary action against anyone endangering the lives of SLMM personnel.

The parties also agreed to take steps to further strengthen the security situation on land, including the establishment of procedures with the cooperation of the SLMM for handling soldiers and cadres apprehended by the other party.

In their political discussions, the parties reiterated their commitment to develop a federal system based on internal self-determination within a united Sri Lanka. As the point of departure for planning how to give effect to the general principles of federalism in a settlement of the ethnic conflict, the parties discussed the essential elements of fiscal federalism.

The parties discussed preliminary issues and a framework for political matters and agreed to expand this into a complete plan at the seventh session of talks. The plan will outline the next steps to be taken by the parties and the topics that must be addressed in order to negotiate a federal solution for Sri Lanka. The parties recognise that a considerable amount of time will be required to address this wide range of topics, which will include geographical regions and the division of powers between the center and regions. In this context, the parties decided to invite the Forum of Federations, a Canadian-based international organization, to participate as consultants at the seventh session of talks.

The LTTE reported on the formation of a Political Affairs Committee consisting of twenty-one leading members of the organization. This committee will undertake an intensive study of federalism over the course of the next three months to build the LTTE's capacity for political transformation. The committee will study federal systems in other parts of the world, arrange seminars for LTTE cadres, consult Tamil parliamentarians and academics and seek advice from lawyers and constitutional experts, to prepare the ground for the process of establishing internal self-determination within a united, federal Sri Lanka.

Following a proposal by the GOSL to prepare for local government election in the North and East, the LTTE will favorably consider supporting the holding of such elections.

It was agreed that the rescheduled meeting between the LTTE and the Muslim representatives in Batticaloa be convened on 27 April 2003. Furthermore, the LTTE and Mr. Rauf Hakeem agreed to arrange a separate meeting between Muslim leaders and the leadership of the LTTE in Kilinochchi to discuss political matters and the participation of a Muslim delegation in negotiation at plenary sessions.

The parties approved the proposal submitted by the Sub-Committee on Gender Issues to establish secretariats in Kilinochchi and Colombo.

Following up on the discussion in Berlin in February on human rights, the parties asked their international human rights adviser, Mr. Ian Martin, to develop three aspects of the proposed roadmap for adoption at the seventh session of talks:

- 1) The drafting of a Declaration of Human Rights and Humanitarian Principles. This would reflect aspects of fundamental international human rights and humanitarian standards, which both parties would undertake to ensure are respected in practice by their personnel, pending the full entrenchment of human rights standards in the eventual constitutional arrangements and in federal and local law.

- 2) The planning of a programme of human rights training for LTTE cadres and government officials, police and prison officials, which would contribute to the

respect of these principles in practice, and of human rights education and awareness for other sections of the population. This programme would include specialized training offered by UNICEF in relation to the rights of the child, UNHCR in relation to the rights of internally displaced persons and refugees, and ICRC in relation to international humanitarian law. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights would be invited to coordinate this programme.

3) Proposals for the strengthening of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to enable it to develop the capacity for increasingly effective monitoring throughout the country. These proposals would involve international advice and assistance to the HRC from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and other sources, and close coordination with the role of UNICEF in relation to child protection, UNHCR in relation to the protection of returning internally displaced persons and refugees, and SLMM in relation to acts against the civilian population.

The parties agreed to hold the seventh session of talks from 29 April to 2 May in Thailand, the eighth session from 12 to 15 June in Japan and the ninth session from 15 to 18 July in Europe (venue to be determined).