

Press Release

Channel-4 : Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York meets Amnesty International

The Head of Amnesty International, United Nations Office, Jose Luis Diaz, met with the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Dr. Palitha Kohona, to initiate a dialogue on issues relating to Sri Lanka, particularly those arising from the screening of the Channel-4 video. This contact followed the comments made by Permanent Representative, Ambassador Palitha Kohona and Deputy Permanent Representative, Ambassador Shavendra Silva, at the screening of the Channel-4 video at the UN Church Centre last month.

Responding to Mr. Diaz on Sri Lanka's response to allegations of human rights violations and war crimes, Ambassador Kohona said that Sri Lanka has always been strongly supportive of the advancement of human rights both domestically and internationally. It was a party to seven core human rights treaties and has been for many years. It was a party to the critical Geneva Conventions. These will govern Sri Lanka's attitudes. Sri Lanka has always sought to be transparent and engage with the international community on these issues. The President of Sri Lanka, H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, a committed human rights activist, had himself led delegations to Geneva to advocate human rights issues. Many special representatives of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have visited Sri Lanka on invitation. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, has been invited to visit Sri Lanka and will undertake a trip in 2012.

Asked about the GOSL response to those who feel that the events close to the end of the conflict must be thoroughly investigated in order to prevent Sri Lanka becoming a model in similar conflict situations, Ambassador Kohona emphasized that Sri Lanka prides itself on being governed by the rule of law and by a long established legal tradition. Sri Lanka had no intention of being a model to anyone else. For example, following complaints about a breach of the UN rules of conduct by some of its troops in Haiti, 110 were recalled immediately and investigated and many were punished. For any matter to be taken before the juridical system, like in other countries, credible evidence was required. The Channel-4 video, and the Darusman Report, were flawed due to serious inaccuracies, unsubstantiated allegations, suspect (doctored) footage, and simple interpretations, some of it clearly taken from the Tamil Net, the propaganda arm of the LTTE. It was doubtful that the Channel-4 footage offered the kind of

credible evidence that would stand scrutiny before the courts. Equally importantly, given the country's limited resources (it was after all, a poor developing country) and the urgency of other pressing issues, it was simply wrong and unethical to pile up pressure only in one area. Sri Lanka had to address a range of priorities immediately the conflict ended. These included providing urgent humanitarian assistance to the IDPS, (food, clothing, shelter, medical care etc.), returning IDPS to their villages and homes, many of which were in dilapidated condition, rehabilitating former child soldiers and adult cadres, clearing landmines, restoring infrastructure, and ensuring the uninterrupted provision of basic services to facilitate the speedy return to normalcy. Many of these have been achieved with remarkable speed and at significant cost. As a responsible democracy prioritization was essential. Accountability issues are being addressed through a domestic process, the LLRC, which has the mandate to deal with infractions of domestic and international standards. It was Sri Lanka's sovereign responsibility to address such issues itself in the first instance. Mr. Diaz agreed. A Special Unit has been established in the Attorney General's Department for the purpose of investigating matters referred to it by the LLRC. What the LLRC, needed was time and space and stability to deal with these issues, not undue pressure. Piling up pressure on Sri Lanka unreasonably will not achieve results. The country and the people were going through a healing process and there was widespread resentment of external interventions.

In order to underline the questionable nature of the Channel-4 footage, the Permanent Representative and the Deputy Permanent Representative highlighted a series of instances (posted below) revealing what were clearly enacted scenes filmed for propaganda purposes. For example, the images of the crowds at the gate of the UN Office in Killinochchi, described with gut wrenching words, by John Snow, appeared to be from two different films; the blade used in the alleged killing of the Tamil combatant did not have any blood on it; the title of the video "Killing Fields", was plagiarized from John Pilger's 1970's documentary on the Khmer Rouge and used for its heart wrenching effect; the scenes of terrified civilians fleeing an aerial bombardment, in the original LTTE footage contained the camerapersons and on-lookers; the shells that landed among the IDP tents somehow left the flimsy tents unscathed; the original of the execution video had people speaking in Tamil. Ambassador Kohona commented that organizations such as Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) placed their credibility at risk by lending their support for dubious and propagandist material manufactured from suspect sources. He said that organizations that promote such dubious material for whatever reason ran the risk of

antagonizing their support base. He also said that without the endorsement of the AI, HRW and the ICG, the Channel-4 producer Callum Mcrae's efforts to screen the video in different places would not have succeeded. When asked by General Silva whether AI would be as diligent in promoting a documentary portraying LTTE atrocities, the Head of the Office of Amnesty International remained silent.

Dr. Kohona asked Mr. Diaz and the INGOs not to take on the role of persecuting Sri Lanka without solid facts. He said that because Sri Lanka valued the honour of its security forces, it did not wish to see its military forces which numbered over 200,000 honest and decent men and women and who fought a brutal terrorist group bravely and at immense cost in lives to achieve peace impugned in this manner.

Ambassador Kohona concluded that judging by the vigor of the Channel 4 campaign and actions of its co-sponsors, the sole aim appeared to be to discredit Sri Lanka. This was also a goal consistent with the aims of the rump LTTE. Sri Lanka had not sought to end the conflict militarily but was compelled to do so after being rebuffed repeatedly as it tried to negotiate a peaceful end to the conflict. While Sri Lankan delegations had attended negotiations three times in 2006, (one delegation was led by Dr. Kohona himself), the LTTE had persisted with a relentless terrorist offensive. Exhorting the AI to remain a responsible and credible organization, Ambassador Kohona pointed out that certain developed countries, despite being better resourced, had taken much longer to address alleged infractions of international standards. Sri Lanka with its limited resources was now being pushed to do the same things in a much shorter period compared with others despite having to address a much more complex range of demands. The LLRC will conclude its work in accordance with its mandate but Sri Lanka needed space and time to deal with these issues. He welcomed the AI to stay engaged in an open and transparent dialogue with Sri Lanka.

The Crowds at the gate of the UN office in killinochchi



1) There is clearly no gap visible on the gate.



2) Arms reaching out from a gap in the middle of the gate.

"Terrified" civilians fleeing an aerial bombardment



1) Photograph issued by the LTTE



2) Actual Photograph with the smiling camera crew

The blade used in the alleged killing of the Tamil combatant does not have blood stains on it



Satellite Imagery of tents and alleged shell holes

6 MAY 2009

10 MAY 2009

