
Investigation Unnecessary and Inappropriate for Extension of GSP+ for Sri Lanka: Bogollagama

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The Government of Sri Lanka finds the procedure of instituting an investigation unnecessary and inappropriate, given the extensive cooperation Sri Lanka has extended to the UN/ILO convention supervisory bodies relevant to the GSP+ process and also through its continuous interaction with the European institutions, stated Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, when he met Benita Ferrero Waldner, EU External Relations Commissioner, today (23 Sept 08) on the fringes of the UNGA in New York. He further stated that the government of Sri Lanka will await the official announcement and the intimation of the EU on the proposed investigation to formally respond in this regard. Minister Bogollagama sought to discuss this issue having learnt that the European Commission had proposed to conduct an investigation on Sri Lanka as per its regulations governing the GSP scheme.

The Foreign Minister explained that the Sri Lanka government's response to any proposed EU measures in connection with the extension of the GSP+ facility will be structured bearing in mind the country's national priorities and interests which in this context are protection of the territorial integrity and fight against separatism, eradication of terrorism, restoring democracy and empowering the people. He therefore regretted that this action by the EC was being taken at a time that Sri Lanka is in the process of post conflict development for its people and would not have expected such a measure from a friendly development partner with whom there has been continuous and open engagement. He further added that Sri Lanka has continuously maintained the most cordial relations with all the EU member states. Elaborating on the post-conflict strategy of empowering the people in the north and east, Minister Bogollagama underscored the imperative need to develop markets and seek their access, which however by the envisaged action of an investigation by the EU would result in depriving those who had been subjugated by the LTTE. He stated that it was not the government which needed to be assisted but the people of Sri Lanka, who had been victims of terrorism. Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Hon. Rohitha Bogollagama Commissioner Waldner acknowledged that the government of Sri Lanka has been compelled to take military measures to counter terrorism of the LTTE and outlined that their concern was primarily the safety of civilians. Foreign Minister Bogollagama appreciated her positive recognition of the government's action against the LTTE. The Commissioner explained that the investigation will mainly be on human rights, and such a procedure has been a process that has worked in other countries. She wished that the EU's action be regarded positively in terms of a review of the conditions Sri Lanka had undertaken, as there is a mandatory compliance the EU requires to extend the GSP+ facility. Addressing the Commissioner's concern on the possible civilian collateral, Minister Bogollagama pointed out the government's experience when clearing the Eastern province of terrorism which had no civilian casualty and emphasised that the same strategy has been adopted for the clearance of the north in order to re-establish democratic rule. With regard to the military engagement and the humanitarian situation in the north, he referred to the humanitarian corridors that had been created for easy movement of persons and supplies between the cleared and uncleared areas. The Minister also briefed the Commissioner on the manner in which the government is collaborating with the UN, ICRC and other INGOs. He further assured that the political process of devolution as contained in the Constitution was being implemented and the APRC process was looking at further measures of devolution, which, at present, is progressing. Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN New York

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