



## Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, Geneva

Tel : (+41) 022 919 12 50, Fax : (+41) 022 734 90 84

E-mail: [mission@lankamission.org](mailto:mission@lankamission.org) Web: [www.lankamission.org](http://www.lankamission.org)

### **Sri Lanka says meaningful engagement not possible with pro-LTTE diaspora seeking to sustain hatred and prevent reconciliation**

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Ravinatha Aryasinha has said politically mobilized pro-LTTE diaspora sustain hatred and prevent reconciliation in Sri Lanka and that with groups having such a pre-disposition meaningful engagement was not possible. Noting that the transnational political opportunity structures prevalent in host states help shape and sustain such diaspora activism, he observed that countries which continue to condone with the hostility and disruptive tendencies shown by such pro-LTTE elements are giving a wrong signal.

Ambassador Aryasinha made these observations when he addressed the International Dialogue on Migration 2013 - Diaspora Ministerial Conference, on the theme 'Diasporas and Development: Bridging between Societies and States' organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and held in Geneva, 18 -19 June 2013. The IOM defines diaspora as "Emigrants and their descendants, who live outside the country of their birth or ancestry, either on a temporary or permanent basis, yet still maintain affective (emotional) and material ties to their countries of origin". The International Ministerial Conference was aimed at considering the various contributions that diaspora communities make both to their countries of origin and the countries where they reside, and to suggest some areas for maximizing the impact of diaspora engagement and to create an enabling environment towards achieving that goal.

Ambassador Aryasinha noted that about 3 million Sri Lankans are estimated to be living as diaspora. While a small share of these are traditional migrants living in the West, over 1.8 million represent what is essentially regarded as a migrant work force in many parts of the world, mainly the Middle East, East Asia and South East Asia. The rest of the Sri Lankan Diaspora, belonging to all ethnicities of Sri Lanka - Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and Burghers, mainly reside in the Western hemisphere, Australia, New Zealand, India and the African continent. Of these, estimates suggest that Sri Lankan Tamils number over 1 million, of which a bulk are refugee claimants and constitute sizeable vote banks with considerable leverage within those political systems.

Ambassador Aryasinha said Sri Lanka offered an instructive example, of both the scope as well as the complexities encountered in the nexus between diaspora, home state and host states. He cautioned that while in general diaspora can play significant roles in the development of their country of origin, particularly in assessing the role of diaspora from countries that remain conflict affected or have recently emerged from protracted conflict, the academic discourse clearly demonstrates that diaspora are rarely autonomous actors. They are known to be compelled by organized networks to fund, arm, engage in propaganda and be electoral vote blocks in host countries, there-by having the potential to act as 'spoilers' in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconciliation in their home states. He said there are

ample instances where even when home states might want to end a conflict or pursue reconciliation, diaspora resist such moves, for it is not their sons and daughters who die, and often keeping the pot boiling in the home states become opportune, so that they might retain greater leverage, particularly in their quest to seek to legally reside or gain citizenship in a chosen host country. He said we should recognize the complexity of this challenge, acknowledge the pre-disposition among some diaspora categories to make meaningful engagement difficult, and try to explore modalities through which both home states and host states could better influence diaspora in processes of conflict resolution, reconciliation and development in their home states.

Having acknowledged the significant contribution made to the Sri Lankan economy by the migrant work force which in 2012 was approximately \$ 6.0 billion which amounted to 33% of the total foreign exchange earnings, Ambassador Aryasinha detailed the steps taken by Sri Lanka to reach out to the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora particularly since the ending of the terrorist conflict, with a view to harness their talents and resources towards the betterment of Sri Lanka. In addition to facilitating visits to the home towns of Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora members and in resolving some of their long standing citizenship and land issues, GOSL has engaged in a structured dialogue with the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora to enable them not only to see for themselves the significant socio-economic, political and cultural renewal taking place in the former conflict affected areas, but also to discuss with them proposals for further political empowerment of the people and economic development of these areas. On the recommendation of the LLRC, the National Plan of Action towards the implementation of the recommendations of the LLRC has also sought the constituting of a " Multi- Disciplinary Task Force" to propose a programme of action to harness the untapped potential of the expatriate community, to respond to the concerns of the so-called 'hostile diaspora groups' and to engage them constructively with the Government and other stakeholders involved in the reconciliation process". A programme is being formulated to harness the untapped potential of the expatriate community through Sri Lankan overseas Missions.

The Ambassador said in order to increase engagement with the Sri Lankan Diaspora a process has also been initiated to hold 'Diaspora Investor Forums' to guide those working abroad on investment opportunities in securities instruments such as equities and bonds, and also to provide sufficient information about the investment opportunities in Sri Lanka and economic growth prospects, so that diaspora can themselves invest and also help in attracting investment into the country. Further, as part of a 'Brain Gain' initiative, 'WorkInSriLanka' has also developed a web portal that provides comprehensive information that links users with key industry bodies in Sri Lanka. Efforts are also being made to avail of the expertise within the Sri Lankan Diaspora by encouraging 'professional mobility' and 'brain circulation' schemes involving Sri Lanka. Additionally, efforts have been made to engage young professionals in the Sri Lankan Diaspora, through initiatives such as the *What's Next!*, an independent forum comprising post-graduates and young professionals of Sri Lankan origin residing in France, who seek to promote a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka through intellectual exchange and multicultural dialogue.

Sri Lanka Mission  
Geneva  
22 June 2013