

Brussels, 24 November 2005

Open Letter from Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner

I have received a number of petitions from EU citizens of Sri Lankan origin about the European Union Declaration which was issued on 26 September and announced that delegations from the LTTE would no longer be received in any of the EU Member States until further notice.

Many of these messages portray the European Union as being indifferent to the fate of Sri Lankan Tamils. On the contrary, I want to point out from the outset that the European Union is deeply aware of the past and present situation of Sri Lankan Tamils. As a Co-Chair of the Tokyo Donors Conference, the European Union remains committed to a balanced approach towards the Sri Lankan conflict. We have done and will continue to do our best to help parties involved in the conflict in their attempts to reach a peaceful settlement guaranteeing the rights of the Tamil and the Muslim minorities. I remain deeply convinced that there is no other solution to the Sri Lankan conflict but a peacefully negotiated agreement along the lines agreed in Oslo in 2002. I have relentlessly pleaded, with both parties to the Ceasefire Agreement, for an end to violence and a return to negotiations. I will continue to do so in the aftermath of the Presidential election.

In terms of aid, the Commission has also done a lot in recent years to assuage the situation of the victims of the Sri Lankan civil war. We have committed humanitarian as well as reconstruction funds to address the situation of the populations of the North and East of Sri Lanka, with a particular attention to returnees and to people up-rooted by the conflict. In reply to the devastating tsunami of last 26 December, the Commission has also earmarked substantial funds specifically for reconstruction in the affected Northern and Eastern districts (€ 55 million, more than half of the total pledge for Sri Lanka). The Commission will ensure that they reach those in need as soon as possible, irrespective of the fate of P-TOMS (Post-Tsunami Operations Management Structure).

However, it has now been three and a half years since the Ceasefire Agreement was signed. While it has held to this date, many of us are concerned that there has been no progress towards a sustainable solution to the conflict. This is a time when both parties would be expected to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from provoking, from responding to provocation, or indeed from doing anything that may lead to an escalation of

the conflict. The international community has repeatedly called on both parties to put their house in order. For the LTTE, this means renouncing violence, stopping political killings, putting an end to child soldier recruitment, and allowing for political pluralism in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

These are issues that my predecessor Chris Patten stressed when he met with Mr Prabhakaran in November 2003. I raised them again when I travelled to Sri Lanka last March and I intended to discuss them once again with Mr Prabhakaran, but he was unable to receive me. My services have expressed the same concerns to Mr Tamilselvan and other LTTE interlocutors, on several occasions. EU Member States have done the same, both in Sri Lanka and outside.

The European Union acknowledges the responsibility of all parties, especially the two signatories to the Ceasefire Agreement, to make progress towards a peaceful settlement of the Sri Lankan conflict. We also acknowledge that the investigation of Mr Kadirgamar's murder has not yet been completed. However, at this crucial moment in the peace process and in the aftermath of the assassination of the Foreign Minister, there is an impending need for the LTTE to give a clear and tangible signal of its willingness to change and its commitment to peace.

Most unfortunately, we have not witnessed any progress in the LTTE's attitude since our September statement. On the contrary, I deeply regret the actions taken by the LTTE on the day of the Presidential election to prevent people from exercising their right to vote in some parts of the North and East. This is in complete contradiction with our earlier calls for greater pluralism and democracy in that part of the country.

Once again, we will assess progress by the LTTE against the four elements I have mentioned above: renouncing violence, stopping political killings, putting an end to child soldier recruitment and allowing for political pluralism in the North and East of Sri Lanka. I hope that the petitioners will use their good offices to convey this message of urgency to the LTTE's leadership.



Benita FERRERO-WALDNER