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DIPARTIMENTO FEDERALE DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI  
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## **Political Affairs Division IV Annual Conference**

### **Human Security: Sri Lanka**

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**Speech by Federal Councillor**

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**Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Berne. I would particularly like to welcome our guest speaker Ian Martin, as well as our guests from Sri Lanka and the representatives of the Tamil diaspora.

This afternoon the Head of the Peace Secretariat of the Sri Lankan government and of the LTTE together with representatives of the Gender Sub-Committee created for the peace process will meet to discuss various aspects of the peace process. There have been no direct contacts of this kind, and certainly none in public, since peace negotiations were broken off in April of this year. We are pleased that the parties have taken the opportunity to hold these discussions in Switzerland. This discussion is also highly topical, because within the next two weeks the LTTE plans to present its proposals to the Sri Lankan government for peace talks which hopefully will start soon afterwards. The government for its part announced its proposals for the interim administration in the north east of Sri Lanka in July.

When I hear the name Sri Lanka, I think of vivid colours, tea, temples, sea, palm trees, meeting Tamils in Swiss restaurants – and of conflict. On a purely personal note, I remember that just after my election as Minister of Foreign Affairs, in my first month of office, one of the first official guests I received was from Sri Lanka (Minister Peiris).

I recently read a travel article about Sri Lanka entitled: "Return to Paradise." One travel agent even used the headline "No Sars, no war: Carefree in Sri Lanka." Certainly travel agents are very busy as tourism to Sri Lanka is starting to pick up. This is a good sign, but the fact that there is no *war* does not mean that there is peace. Many of you who are here today have suffered or are still suffering from the consequences of the conflict between the majority Sinhalese government and the Tamil LTTE. The complex ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has claimed over 60,000 lives. Human rights violations were committed by all sides: torture, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, killings. I consider it very important that the negotiating partners have integrated the human rights issue into the peace process. In my view the subject of impunity also belongs on the agenda here. This is because respect for human rights and for international law is an indispensable foundation without which lasting peace agreements are not possible. If international human rights norms are properly understood and effectively implemented, they serve to protect individuals against injustice, arbitrary treatment and attacks on their personal security. Specifically I would like

Switzerland to continue to study this subject in depth in order to identify further constructive elements to promote the peace process.

The inclusion of the human rights issue in the peace negotiations in Sri Lanka was partly the result of pressure from non-governmental organisations. In my view this illustrates what an important function civil society fulfils, especially in the crucial area of participation by individual citizens. That is why, in conjunction with Germany, we support the "Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation" in Colombo, a network which embraces all of civil society and is organised by the *Berghof Foundation*. The objective of this network is to improve the overall capacity for constructive conflict settlement and peace-building in Sri Lanka. It is concerned with negotiation techniques, mediation mechanisms and other aspects of conflict transformation and with learning from other conflicts (e.g. Northern Ireland, South Africa) as well as with constitutional law in relation to the tensions arising from Tamil demands for autonomy on the one hand and the unity of Sri Lanka on the other.

Switzerland has intensified its involvement in peace-building, development cooperation and humanitarian aid in Sri Lanka since the agreement of 22nd February 2002. Civilian peace-building is a central concern of Swiss foreign policy. Within my department, Political Affairs Division IV is responsible for peace policy, human rights policy, humanitarian policy and migration policy. These activities are all subordinated to the overall goal of ensuring that all human beings can live without fear. It is also very much in Switzerland's own interest, from an ethical and humanitarian standpoint as well as for a wide variety of political, economic and ecological reasons, to do everything in its power to help to resolve violent conflicts in the world's conflict areas. The mission of promoting and of preserving peaceful co-existence between nations is also one of the primary objectives of Swiss foreign policy. I am convinced that the importance of civil peace-building will increase in the future. Crisis prevention is more humane, more politically effective and less expensive than reactive conflict management. The international costs of preventing a conflict, for example, are demonstrably far lower than the costs of post-war reconstruction. Countries to which peace has been restored and which have been stabilised do not compel people to flee, and can also re-establish economic relations. Peace policies require funds, and we are prepared to invest money in our peace policies. Sadly it is easier all over the world to find money to instigate a war than to obtain money to finance peace-building. The Federal Council presented a bill to Parliament on a credit facility for conflict transformation measures and the promotion of human rights. I am confident that the members of parliament will acknowledge the need for these funds to ensure that Switzerland can actively promote

peace and compliance with human rights even more effectively in various parts of the world.

Another reason why we are meeting here today is to find out how we can step up our involvement further and, equally important, how we can all learn from our respective experiences. I am thinking particularly here of our experience with the system of federalism. We know that the conflicting parties are interested in learning from experiences with decentralised federal power-sharing mechanisms as a means of getting away from the highly centralised system that has been in place in Sri Lanka up to now. We therefore support exchanges of views on issues such as constitutionalism, federalism, decentralised structures and civil administration. A number of important conferences on these topics have been held, for example a conference organised by the Institute of Federalism in Fribourg and the International Conference on Federalism 2002 in St. Gallen. In my view it is crucial that Swiss contributions to the topic of peaceful solutions should be firmly embedded in a context and that part of our own political identity should flow into these contributions. This does not mean praising our federal system as a universal panacea. Peace cannot be exported or decreed, but we do try on the basis of our experience to bring the advantages and the disadvantages of our tried-and-tested system to bear on individual peace processes.

The violations of human rights and of international law committed by all the conflicting parties that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech have compelled many people to flee from Sri Lanka.

The total number of people from Sri Lanka living in Switzerland, including those who have obtained Swiss citizenship, was 38,310 at the end of 2002. By way of comparison, this is almost a third of the population of the city of Berne or almost half the population of the town of Galle, a port in the south of Sri Lanka.

The high level of immigration from Sri Lanka has been a challenge for Switzerland. In general, Switzerland has problems with the topic of immigration, as is illustrated by the federal referendum of November 2002. Many Swiss people are concerned because the number of asylum seekers in general is rising in Switzerland and repatriation procedures are difficult to implement for a variety of reasons. Many are also worried because there are some asylum seekers who resort to crime and in so doing give other asylum seekers a bad name. The Tamils in Switzerland have demonstrated that in their case such fears are largely unfounded.

The complex issue of migration cannot be solved by means of purely national, intra-state defensive mechanisms. Stabilisation of the political, social and economic situation reduces the pressure to emigrate. This is why in future I would like to see the various instruments of foreign policy being designed so as to take even greater account of migration policy concerns. The purpose of the "Berne Initiative" initiated by Switzerland is to establish an international process of dialogue on migration at a global level.

The fact that the Sri Lankan diaspora in Switzerland is one of the largest in the world in relation to the total population here is one of the reasons behind the Swiss civil peace-building programme in Sri Lanka. The causes of migration from Sri Lanka can ultimately be tackled only at their source – by finding a sustainable peaceful solution. As far as the general development of Sri Lanka is concerned, you, ladies and gentlemen - as members of the diaspora - constitute a vital resource in human terms and in terms of financial capacity – young people who have seen the world, have gained experience and are part of the brain force that is exactly what the country needs for its reconstruction.

As far as the return of Tamils to Sri Lanka is concerned, there is a need for reconciliation, but security is also vital. In this context I am thinking above all of the clearing of mines. Switzerland has supported the mine-clearing project run by the "Fondation Suisse de Déminage" since September 2002. The agricultural, commercial and residential areas that the returning population need will have to be made accessible again. In this context I would like to appeal to the conflicting parties to undertake to comply with the Ottawa Convention and the Geneva Call and to forgo the use of anti-personnel mines in future. As a signatory to the Ottawa convention, Switzerland is committed to a world free of mines. Working in close cooperation with the ICRC, WHO and UNICEF, Switzerland has developed a comprehensive strategy of aid for victims. It is not confined to victims of mines – all victims of violence and trauma sufferers are integrated into the care and re-integration programmes without any form of discrimination. In recent years, Geneva has developed into an important international centre for action against anti-personnel mines. The activities of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, which is financed to a large extent by the Swiss government, include major contributions to research in this field. We also support various Swiss aid organisations involved in reconstruction in Sri Lanka. Our total budget for our activities in Sri Lanka this year amounts to 8 million francs. However I must stress here that all our efforts will only bear fruit if all conflicting parties contribute wholeheartedly and equally to the success of the peace process and do not let up in their efforts to achieve peace.

In my opinion it is essential to take account of the gender aspect in all attempts at conflict resolution. Equal gender opportunities can be achieved only if efforts are made to achieve this goal in all areas of politics, including peace politics. Women play an important but often unrecognised part in training for peace in the family and the social environment. As women are responsible for the maintenance of the social order, which is threatened by breakdown in the event of conflict, they should play an active part in the prevention of war and should also become involved in activities beyond their immediate environment. In this context the measures formulated in the Swiss action plan following the 1999 World Women's Conference in Peking should continue to be taken seriously:

"Involving women more closely in the management of democracy-building and peace-building measures and in conflict resolution."

"Increasing the participation of women in the activities of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy".

Women must be given an opportunity to make their contribution to the peace efforts by participating equally with men in political and economic decisions. Just as questions of costs and economics play a key role in many decisions, so too the gender mainstreaming principle ought to be made increasingly central to the issue of gender relations. I was greatly impressed recently when I read a comparison of this process with the braiding of plaits. Up to now the plaits have been made with strands such as objective relevance, viability and costs. The question of how women would be affected was not raised until the end of the process, if at all. So at the end a little ribbon is added to the completed plaits. By contrast, gender mainstreaming means that the question of gender relations is one of the main strands in the plaits themselves, which is woven into them throughout the process and affects decisions from the outset. Sunila Abeysekera, winner of a UN human rights award, argues that the conflict has forced Sri Lankan society to change its attitude towards women because circumstances have compelled women to take on more responsibility for areas which in "normal" times were the prerogative of men. To quote an example, within the segment of the internally displaced population women play a vital role in the ensuring the cohesion of the family and in securing its livelihood. This is an area in which a new woman's consciousness "from below" could emerge.

Even though we acknowledge that not all women were victims and peace-lovers – after all many women in Sri Lanka carried arms –it remains a fact that the peace potential of women is still seriously under-used. Women's networks or platforms could play an important role in this country. Given the low level of institutionalisation in this area, I find the German proposal to establish a World Women's Security Council interesting. This body

would work together with all non-governmental organisations working in the areas of women's rights, peace, security and human rights. This council would not operate within the UN but would criticise UN policy from the outside and whenever possible it would exert influence to bring about improvements.

I would like to conclude with my vision of a Sri Lanka in which peaceful co-existence in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society is possible. So that many of you can return to the paradise which the travel agent is promising even today.

I would like to conclude by hoping that you have stimulating discussions and I wish you every success.

Thank you.