

Have a Supportive approach to SL – says MEP

The chairman of the European Parliament's informal 'Friends of Sri Lanka', the Conservative MEP and Defence Spokesman Geoffrey Van Orden has visited Sri Lanka recently.

As Sri Lanka is recovering from the 30 years of conflict, Mr. Van Orden has called for supportive engagement with Sri Lanka.

During his visit Mr. Van Orden has met the President and senior Ministers, as well as MPs from a range of government and opposition political parties including the TNA members. He has also visited the Detention Camp at Boosa and a post-Tsunami village at Weligama.

After his return Mr Van Orden commented about his trip to Sri Lanka as follows:

"Wherever I went I received a clear message - relief that the conflict is over; optimism that the country is now making economic progress; and recognition that reconciliation and political consensus are essential if a repeat of the circumstances that incubated terrorism 30 years ago are to be avoided.

I was encouraged by indications that the "Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission", which has just reported, has come up with robust conclusions that will address many international concerns. The report will be presented to Parliament shortly. I am clear that Sri Lankans must deal with these matters in their own way and require our constructive support and encouragement in this.

The most serious and consistent abusers, particularly of the Tamil population and Moslems, have been the LTTE terrorists."

"Even the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which represents a significant element of the Tamil vote, is no longer pursuing a separatist agenda. They stated directly to me their willingness 'to be absorbed into the Sri Lankan mosaic' and to 'cooperate responsibly for a long-term solution'. The TNA must ensure that it conveys a similarly positive message when its spokesmen travel abroad. "

"For some the glass is always half empty - I see it as more than half full. Demining, construction of housing, and reclamation of agricultural land has enabled over 290,000 persons displaced by the conflict to return to their villages in the North without fear. Sri Lanka's GDP is growing at over 8% a year and accelerating. Infrastructure - including a first

motorway - is being dramatically improved.

"To help the process, there needs to be positive, generous and warm-hearted support from the international community for Sri Lanka - a friendly, democratic, Commonwealth country with very strong historic links with the UK and other European nations.