

Statement by Hon. Prof. Tissa Vitharana, the Minister of Science and Technology of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Special Plenary Session on the Indian Ocean Disaster

Jan 20, 2005

Sri Lanka is fast recovering from the worst disaster in its history. But there is still a long way to go. The response of the people was spontaneous and magnificent and the support given to those affected erased all divisions. The government has set up a National Task Force composed of all political leaders headed by the President to direct operations and has also invited the LTTE. Under the National Task Force there are three committees handling relief and rehabilitation, logistics and law and order, and reconstruction. The private sector has been accorded a leading position in this organizational framework.

The government is determined to make sure that every affected person gets food, shelter and healthcare, and in the interest of re-uniting the country has given six times more supplies to the north and the east which has a Tamil majority, than to the south. It would be better if the LTTE, which fought to set up a separate Tamil state, had deviated from those policy interests so as to effectively work with us. But the fact that at district level LTTE leaders are participating in the government coordination meetings is a healthy sign. Any assistance from the international community to further encourage the participation of the LTTE in the national relief and rehabilitation program would be very welcome.

The planned reconstruction program has already been finalized in accordance with the long-term development program of the country and has taken in to consideration the need for effective coast conservation, safety of the people in relation to natural hazards and the economic development of the affected areas. The government welcomes foreign assistance and has provided the opportunity for such donors to pick up suitable projects which are part of the national development program for implementation by the donors.

The government appreciates the role being played by civil society and is establishing mechanisms to integrate their efforts into the total national recovery and development program. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the magnificent support given by the international community to Sri Lanka and the other affected countries at this time of grief and tragedy. We hope that the setting up of early warning mechanisms and other proposed preventive actions would help to avert similar tragedies in the future. This should also be made the occasion for improving disaster reduction capabilities, particularly strengthening preparedness and prevention programs, to protect our people from all future hazards.

Thank you.