

Canadian Statement
delivered by the Hon. David Kilgour, Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific)
at the "Sri Lanka: Reconstruction and Development Seminar"
U.S. State Department, Washington, D.C.
14 April 2003

Canada wishes to extend our gratitude to the Government of the United States for organising this important gathering in support of the Sri Lankan peace process. The large number of governments and organisations here today is a testament to the importance the international community attaches to the successful conclusion of the process. We also wish to re-iterate our commendation to the Government of Norway for their perseverance in assisting the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in their efforts to find a permanent peace.

Today's seminar serves as an important impetus to the preparations which are currently underway around the globe for the Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development in Sri Lanka scheduled for June. The Canadian government recognises that peace and economic growth are inextricably linked, and that meetings, such as these, are indispensable elements of the overall peace process.

Canada looks forward to participating in the June 2003 Tokyo Reconstruction Conference. As we prepare for this event, the Canadian government will be looking for continued progress in the peace talks, including tangible progress on the agreements already secured in earlier rounds, most notably those regarding human rights, and the parties' commitment to pursuing a political resolution within a federal framework.

Canada strongly supports the efforts currently underway to peacefully resolve the conflict in Sri Lanka. We recognise that the issues to be resolved are complex, and commend both the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for their commitment to stay the course, despite the difficulties which have arisen, and the magnitude of the differences to be bridged.

Canada is encouraged that both sides have agreed to seek a lasting peace agreement within a federal system. We believe that some form of federal system of governance, suitably tailored to Sri Lanka's unique circumstances, offers the most realistic framework for a permanent solution to the conflict. Canada re-confirms our commitment to providing the parties with technical advice on matters respecting federal options, so long as the parties continue to desire, and make use of, such assistance.

Canada regrets that within Sri Lanka anti-personnel landmines continue to pose a serious threat to civilian and military personnel alike, as well as hinder the return of displaced persons, the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the implementation of more long-term reconstruction and development initiatives. To address these challenges, we call upon the parties to pledge a firm commitment to the principles of the Ottawa Convention.

Canada urges both parties to redouble their efforts in the weeks and months ahead to move towards finding a permanent political resolution to their differences, ever mindful of the need for compromise, if the peace process is to succeed. We look forward to learning from the parties their plans for achieving this objective, as well as their plans for operationalising, as an integral part of the current process, their commitment to human rights, good governance, and democratic pluralism.