

Chairman's Summary

by

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*“Observation of the Progress of National Reconciliation and Reconstruction
in Sri Lanka”*

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Diplomats from Bangladesh, Brazil, Italy, Japan, Nigeria, Romania, and South Africa, as well as faculty from Columbia University, participated in an observation mission to Sri Lanka (6-8 December 2012). The delegation visited Colombo, Jaffna and Kilinochchi. It met with officials from the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL), opposition members of parliament, civil society representatives, religious figures, the Colombo-based business and diplomatic communities, and members of the United Nations country team.

This project -- “Observation of the Progress of National Reconciliation and Reconstruction in Sri Lanka” -- is organized by the Government of Japan in association with Columbia University. The Government of Sri Lanka provides assistance to the project. The goal of this project is to encourage the progress of national reconciliation and reconstruction in Sri Lanka through observation from neutral, objective viewpoints. The delegation hopes its observation may be the basis for assessing progress towards implementation of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) recommendations, challenges with implementation, and requirements for further implementation, including recommendations.

The Chairman’s report (attached to this summary) outlines the observations and findings of the delegation. The report deals with the progress of reconstruction as well as the challenges of reconciliation, combining information from both government and non-government sources. It also suggests steps that may assist with the stated goals of reconstruction and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Because of the time constraints of the mission, the observations and findings of the delegation cannot necessarily cover all the issues Sri Lanka faces. The report, however, highlights some of the important issues, including accountability, the rule of law, human rights, and military issues. This summary abstracts the delegation’s conclusion.

Since the war’s end in May 2009, Sri Lanka has made great progress on reconstruction, especially rebuilding infrastructure, and with economic development. While it has also made progress with resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and rehabilitation of ex-LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) combatants, additional measures are needed to assist the resettled IDPs and reintegrate the ex-combatants.

Building confidence is equally important as reconstruction. Adhering to international norms of human rights, demonstrating a commitment to the rule of law, and decreasing

the footprint of the military in civilian life will help to build confidence among all communities in Sri Lanka. Priority Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) could include accounting for missing persons, addressing land issues, and holding elections in the Northern Province.

There was a great opportunity to heal society's wounds after the end of the conflict. However, the delegation observed that there was a "trust deficit" among different stakeholders. The government is upbeat about its performance and records, while the opposition, civil society and NGO perception, including that of Western diplomats, is opposite.

The delegation heard many ideas for further advancing reconstruction and reconciliation in Sri Lanka, some of which are summarized below.

- Implement the National Action Plan (NAP): The GSL should intensify its efforts to implement the NAP, and make progress reports available to the public. An inclusive mechanism to monitor implementation of the NAP would also assist reconciliation. The international community can support GSL's efforts by offering expertise and providing financial resources.
- Popularize the LLRC report: The GSL can engage civil society more fully by disseminating Sinhalese and Tamil versions of the LLRC report using the State media, traditional print media, and social media. Trilingual summary booklets could be produced and made accessible at the grass-roots level.
- Intensify confidence building: Priority CBMs include speedy, free and fair elections for the Northern Provincial Council (no later than September 2013); accounting for missing persons and issuing death certificates; and set-up of a land commission drawing on best practices for property claims and restitution. Twinning programs that bring youth together from all parts of the country, as well as twinning of women's groups, are also useful CBMs.
- Expand minority language use: The donor community could support full and effective implementation of the GSL's language policy, especially the use of Tamil as an official language and as a language of educational instruction.
- Promote political dialogue: Direct talks between the GSL and Tamil National Alliance (TNA) should be held, with the goal of agreeing on principles as the basis for a more inclusive Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) process.
- Reduce military presence: While the GSL's effort is noted, the Sri Lanka

Army's role and visibility in the North and East and the military's role performing civilian functions could be further reduced.

- Focus on women: The GSL could consider adopting a NAP for implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. More women could be included in the police forces of the North and East, while ensuring that women police officers are proficient in local languages, and strengthening the women's desks in police stations to better handle gender based violence.
- Highlight children's issues: Child tracing activities, family reunification, and psycho-social services should be provided for war-affected children.
- Protect even more the cultural and religious rights of all ethnic groups, and encourage all religious leaders to bring a stronger contribution to the process of reconciliation.
- Encourage the development of the capacity of local politicians in building stronger community-level party organizations, better able to address local needs in the North and East, particularly on land and livelihood issues.

As exemplified by the GSL and other parties concerned during the delegation's visit, efforts by Sri Lanka to keep its door open and to provide credible explanations would be welcomed.