

Sri Lanka: International Conference on Countering Terrorism draws international terrorism experts to Colombo



Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka - Geneva - Switzerland



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The three-day International Conference on Countering Terrorism is now on in Colombo on the theme 'Terrorism: A Challenge to Democratically Elected Governments.' The Conference, brought together renowned terrorism experts, including from the academia and the media, from 23 countries including Australia, China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, the United States and Vietnam. It was also widely attended by the Diplomatic Community .

Delivering the Inaugural Address, Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, highlighted that "Sri Lanka had been a foot soldier in the battle against terrorism over a long period of time and notwithstanding some impediments and setbacks, can in several aspects count itself as having been a success story in the battle against terrorism." Sri Lanka's refusal to compromise or condone terrorism while constantly seeking to resolve the conflict through political means, to persuade other states to proscribe the LTTE, prevent money flows and apprehend those conniving with terrorists, has been significant. Successive governments and the people of Sri Lanka have also shown considerable resilience in the face of terror, whilst also ensuring that economic growth was not compromised. The Minister hoped that the deliberations of this Conference would, among other matters focus on the need for states to go beyond merely adopting conventions, to convert these into tangible action by developing enabling legislation and taking concrete action against those including terrorist front organizations operating from their soil. Noting that a bulk of maritime traffic passes through the Indian Ocean region and that in recent times many acts of terrorism had taken place in these waters, the Minister emphasized the urgent necessity to develop robust modalities to arrest the growing threat that faces Indian Ocean states from terrorists.

The former Director of the European Center for the Study of Conflicts in France, and one of the earliest writers in the field of terrorism, Dr. Gerard Chaliand traced the evolution of terrorism over the years. Referring to the LTTE, he said "the independence they ask cannot be granted and should not be granted, not only because no State is willing to accept such a blow to its sovereignty but also because, like the Shining Path or the Khmer Rouges, the

LTTE under the leadership of V. Prabhakaran is a totalitarian movement, which has transformed its groups into a killing machine." He said "the most important thing about the LTTE is that it is a totalitarian movement fighting in a country which is democratic." He said the "LTTE has brutally eliminated all other parties or groups willing to represent the Tamils". "An absolutely intolerant sect, no peace seems possible with V. Prabhakaran as we have seen from the peace process of 2002-2005, which was but a tactical truce", Dr. Chaliand added.

Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Palitha Kohona delivering the vote-of-thanks repeated the unprecedented challenge Sri Lanka faces in combating terrorism and Sri Lanka. He said the world had focused on international terrorism only after 9/11 but terrorism had affected countries long before then. He emphasized that "the international rule of law against terrorism is being strong themed each year," adding that "there are 13 UN Conventions addressing different dimensions of the global terrorist threat and a comprehensive convention is being negotiated." The Foreign Secretary pointed out that "terrorism will never be eradicated solely by cooperation among law enforcement officials. It requires a concerted political effort and policy coordination among countries. Further it also requires an ability to understand and minimize the motivation and impetus that inspire terrorist acts."

Renowned Chairman of the French Anti-Terrorist Judges, Judge Jean Louis Bruguiere, who was the Guest of Honour of the Conference, and addressing the first panel of the day focused on the international responses to terrorism, traced the manner in which international efforts at responding to terrorism have evolved over the years, stating that if the fight against terrorism is an inescapable requirement, "we owe it to ourselves to reinforce our international cooperation at every level, notably by adopting multilateral or bilateral conventions in the field of judicial cooperation as well as extradition." He said the French Government considers "that an organization like the LTTE is a terrorist organization like any other and that its activities even in the area of logistics, have to be repressed with the same vigour as for terrorist networks operating on our [French] soil and threatening us directly" and that on this basis "that in April this year the French Government had dismantled a vast network of Tamil militants who actively supported the LTTE, notably at the financial level."

This session, which was chaired by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Colombo, Prof. Amal Jayawardena, while the discussants were the Executive Director of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Dr. Rifaat Hussain and the Senior Terrorism Prevention Officer of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna, Dr. Ms. Irka Kuleshnyk.

Addressing the panel on regional responses to terrorism, former Commander of the Indian Army, Gen. V. P. Malik emphasized the need to combat and defeat terrorism in all its manifestations. He said "terrorist activities anywhere will stop only when their fuel runs out." Gen. Malik who traced the important steps taken to counter terrorism in South Asia, emphasized the need for a regional strategy and cooperation, but essentially local operatives and doctrines.

Former Secretary General of SAARC, Ambassador Nihal Rodrigo, chaired this session, while the discussants comprised the Associate Research Fellow of the China Institute of International Studies, Prof. Zhang Lijun, the Deputy Director of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Mr. Vladimir Titokerni as well as the Pro-Chancellor and Director of the School of Science and Forensic Science, National Law University Rajasthan, India, Prof. P. Chandra Sekharan.

The third thematic session focused on the domestic dimensions of terrorism where the head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore, Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, who was the principal speaker, who joining the deliberations on a video link, highlighted the recent successes of the security forces in combating LTTE terrorism. He noted that within the year the Sri Lanka Navy destroyed eight merchant vessels. In order to defeat the LTTE, Dr. Gunaratna articulated the need for strengthening and building capacity in the intelligence field, with a high degree of professionalism, and also stressed the necessity for special forces and elite units that could target the leadership of the LTTE.

Former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Chandra Fernando chaired the discussion at which intervention were made by Deputy Solicitor General, Mr. Dappula de Livera and Prof. Karunaratne Hangawatte of the University of Nevada.

The final panel discussion of the day focused of the critical area of combating terrorist financing, where the Founder and CEO of World-Check, Mr. David Leppan spoke extensively on the manner in which terror groups collect funds and their illegal activities.

Researcher of the Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism of the Macquarie University of Australia, Mr. Shanaka Jayasekera the co-speaker at this session noted that the LTTE's supply chain capability has been significantly disrupted, estimated at between 65% to 70%. This would result in the need for the LTTE to aggressively campaign for fund raising activities in the 12 top level resource mobilization countries. In order to maintain the advantage the Government has achieved, it is imperative that the fund-raising be curbed with international cooperation in the next few months. Therefore it is suggested that a contact group be established as a prelude to the commencement of a political process."

The Deputy Governor of the Central Bank, Dr. Ms. Ranee Jayamaha chaired the sessions, at which the discussants were Mrs. Joan De Zilva Moonesinghe formerly of the Financial Investigation Unit and the Advisor of the Financial Investigation Unit of the Central Bank, Mr. Eric Stonecipher.

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