

H. E. the Chairman,
European Parliament
Brussels
Belgium.

Your Excellency,

Imperative need for the extension of GSP+ concession to Sri Lanka

We, expatriate Sri Lankans residing in Italy, are appealing to Your Excellency to restore the GSP+ duty concession, which the European Union has decided to withdraw with effect from August 2010.

We wish to bring to your attention the statements made by several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) urging the EU to extend GSP+ concession to Sri Lanka. German MEP Jo Leinen has written to the European Commission (EC) asking them to reconsider their stance on GSP+ and grant Sri Lanka an extension of the trade concession. Italian MEP Cristiana Muscardini has also expressed a similar opinion. Vice President of the Committee on Overseas Development of the European Parliament, Niranjan Deva-Aditya (Nirj Dev) has gone further by strongly condemning the EU decision.

"We would like to request that you take a closer look at this important issue and take measures to prevent the withdrawal of GSP+ status from Sri Lanka taking effect on 15th August 2010. We need to work towards a solution, so that the people of Sri Lanka can continue to benefit from GSP+ status which has played, and I hope will continue to play, a significant role in Sri Lanka in continuing its efforts at achieving its Millennium Development Goals," the letter from Jo Leinen to the European Commission said. Leinen also stated, "the latest developments in Sri Lanka are promising."

Letters written by Jo Leinen and Cristiana Muscardini cite the improvement of the situation in Sri Lanka and their confidence that the extension of the trade concession would benefit the country.

"Nowadays significant democratic measures have been adopted in Sri Lanka, such as Tamil involvement in the democratic process," Muscardini wrote. Muscardini also mentions the importance of financial assistance towards furthering the democratic process in Sri Lanka.

"We acknowledge that the democratic process is still far from being accomplished; but financial aid is necessary to help out Sri Lanka and to allow it to continue on such a path -- given that a withdrawal of GSP+ preferences could undermine not only its economic progress but also damage its political image worldwide," her letter said.

Vice President of the Committee on Overseas Development of the European Parliament, Niranjan Deva-Aditya (Nirj Dev) condemned more than ten impossible conditions set by the EU to renew Sri Lanka's GSP Plus facility as interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

Deva-Aditya said that it was up to the parliament, government and the people of Sri Lanka to decide on the laws that should govern them and not the business of ex-colonial masters to instruct a former colony what to do. Deva-Aditya, said it was not the 700 elected fellow MPs of the European Parliament that was making all these demands, but the European Commission (the civil service) at the behest of the European Council (the second chamber) made up of European government ministers.

As Minister of External Affairs Prof. G. L. Peiris who categorically stated to the European Union Ambassador Bernard Savage and representatives of the EU Member States, the Government of Sri Lanka is not in a position to proceed on the basis of the unacceptable conditions and ultimatum put forward by the EU with regard to the benefits of GSP Plus.

While reiterating the Government's firm stance of not proceeding with the EU conditions, Prof. Peiris agreed to consider constructive proposals by the European Commission which did not compromise Sri Lanka's dignity and sovereignty.

In a spirit of open discussion, the Government had also informed the Commission that revoking certain limited measures essential for public safety and national security could not be considered in the present context in Sri Lanka and could be re-considered at a later date. It was against this background that the Government was taken by surprise by the further conditions, and the deadlines stipulated in the letter dated June 17, 2010 by the European Commission.

As Your Excellency is aware, Sri Lanka has been plagued with terrorism for more than 30 years which was unleashed by the world's most ruthless terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). The LTTE killed tens of thousands of innocent unarmed men, women, children and religious dignitaries and vandalized private and state properties worth billions of rupees converting our motherland into living hell.

The EU must realize that the Sri Lankan forces succeeded in eliminating the terrorist threat and liberated more than 300,000 civilians who had been kept as a human-shield by the LTTE.

After the humanitarian operations, the Government took swift action to resettle IDPs and developed the infrastructure of the affected areas and brought normalcy and civil administration by holding democratic elections. Subsequently, His

Excellency the President appointed a "Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission" (LLR) under the Commission of Inquiry Act to look into the concerns of the affected parties during the conflict period. The public sittings of LLR are to take place soon thereby providing opportunity to any affected person to come out with the truth.

All child combatants were immediately released and handed over to their families. The former LTTE combatants have been reformed and absorbed into civil society. Hundreds of male and female ex-combatants were provided with employment. A mass wedding ceremony was held for male and female combatants who desired to get married and they were provided with employment in the garment industry and elsewhere. Is there any State in the world which has shown such a level of magnanimity and humane treatment to surrendered terrorists?

After the defeat of terrorism, a peaceful atmosphere is prevailing in the country and racial amity is fast improving paving way for turning our motherland once again into her past glory and prosperity.

Furthermore, the denial of GSP+ would result in the closure of some of the garment factories where thousands of female workers are employed. Most of them are sole bread-winners of their households and their loss of employment would be a hard blow to the rural poor people. It will also cause irreparable damage to the women empowerment programmes in Sri Lanka.

In these circumstances, we request Your Excellency to make initiatives to review the EU decision and grant an extension to the GSP+ concession to Sri Lanka.

We appreciate your cooperation very much,

Yours Sincerely,

Ananda Senevirathna
Sri Lanka association
Rome Italy

Behalf of Expatriate Sri Lankans in Italy