

Statement made by Hon. Vasantha Senanayake, State Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Adjournment Debate in Parliament on 14th November 2017, on the resolution proposed by Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena, M.P. on the recent debate on Sri Lanka in the House of Lords, UK.

Hon. Speaker,

The adjournment resolution that has been placed before this House today is based on the observations that Lord Naseby made in his recent address to the House of Lords, and calls on the Government to take action to pursue his comments with the international community to 'remove the threat to this country, to its defence forces, and to its leaders'.

Hon. Speaker, in light of the excellent relationship that Sri Lanka now enjoys with the international community and the confidence that the international community has, that Sri Lanka will honour its undertakings made to the international community. I cannot perceive a threat to this country either with regards to defence forces or its leaders present or former. Certainly the information unearthed by Lord Naseby highlights the professional conduct of the Sri Lankan army during the period of the war and this information must be used by the Government and opposition parties and all those who consider themselves Sri Lankans or friends of Sri Lanka to counter the blatant falsehoods that were spread about the country and the war. It is then our common duty to combat deliberate misinformation and the findings of the Rt. Hon. The Lord Naseby is greatly useful to further this purpose. However, we must not in all this lose sight of this government's role as a respected member of the international community and it must be emphasized that the Government of the United Kingdom is a strongly supportive one. We have traditionally enjoyed a very close link with the United Kingdom even after independence which for Sri Lanka was won through negotiations unlike neighbouring India. We retained much of the old Government structure and the constitution and also invoked a Defence Agreement with the UK immediately after becoming independent. This shows the level of trust we have always enjoyed. It was only short sighted policies that took Sri Lanka to an isolated position in the world and isolated us from our friends including the UK.

Hon. Speaker, regarding Lord Naseby's statement, let me reiterate the Government's deep appreciation to him for the continuous and long standing support and friendship he has extended to Sri Lanka and I table* the letter dated 2nd November 2017 sent by His Excellency the President to Lord Naseby appreciating his work.

** Placed in the Library*

I wish to inform the House that I made it my purpose to meet with him almost immediately after I had been appointed as State Minister of Foreign Affairs as far back as June this year.

I also informed His Excellency the President that it is imperative that we acknowledge his efforts and I took the initiative upon the President's concurrence to strongly support Lord Naseby. I did so not in my private capacity but as the State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka. I wish to assure the members of the House that all due respect is being given to Lord Naseby and to his good work.

Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena made a statement that attempts were being made to trivialize the value of Lord Naseby's work and to label it as irrelevant. I wish to very strongly state that it is not my personal views and that it is not the view of the Foreign Ministry of Sri Lanka.

I would also like to quote my letter of unequivocal support which I wish to read here.

"Dear Lord Naseby,

I am writing to thank you formally for the invaluable work you have been doing on behalf of Sri Lanka. We are well aware of your great efforts in the past, but what you have contributed in the last few months is particularly important at a crucial time.

It was very insightful of you to ask for the despatches of the British Defence Attaché who served here during the last years of the long conflict from which this country suffered. Though the British Foreign Office appears to have forgotten what are undoubtedly salient elements, what you have brought into the public domain makes it clear that the Sri Lankan armed forces fought a much cleaner war than is often alleged in the international arena. I suspect that if some of the redaction is removed from the documents already made available to you, the sincerity of the Sri Lankan armed forces will become undisputed. This redaction, according to the explanation given to you is purportedly for securing confidentiality between the British Foreign Office and friendly nations of the international community, however, as far as Sri Lanka is concerned we are quite certain that the original version without redaction will in no way be embarrassing to us. Therefore, we must ask ourselves, why extraordinary lengths have been resorted to, to deprive yourself, one of the senior-most and respected Peers in the House of Lords, of pertinent information, and why indeed what has been given to you subjected to redaction?

It was also very good of you to speak so much more forcefully at the recent debate in the House of Lords. It is particularly important to deal with the various canards that are being spread, and your arguments go to show that the number of civilian deaths was significantly smaller than is being bandied about are clear and irrefutable.

I hope that we in Sri Lanka will be able to build on your work, to ensure that our victory over the terrorists who inflicted such suffering on all our people, Tamils as well as Sinhalese and Muslims, is not traduced.

I look forward to meeting you on my next visit to England, and hope too that you will once again visit this country to which, and to all its people, you have shown such deep commitment.

I fully consent to your using or reproducing this letter, if it will in anyway assist you in your laudable mission of bringing 'real' justice to Sri Lanka."

I think my letter makes my position extremely clear.

මූලාසනාරූඪ ගරු මන්ත්‍රීතුමනි, අපේ හමුදාවට වසර ගණනක් සිදු වූ නරක සහ අසාධාරණය, නැස්බි සාමිතුමාගෙන් වූ හෙළිදරව්ව නිසා අද යම් ප්‍රමාණයකට හෝ සාධාරණීකරණය වෙලා තිබෙනවා. අපේ සියලු මන්ත්‍රීවරුන්ගෙන් - පක්ෂ විපක්ෂ සියලු මන්ත්‍රීතුමන්ලාගෙන් - මම ඉල්ලීමක් කරනවා. මේ වෙලාවේ අපට මේ ලැබී තිබෙන්නේ අපේ ආණ්ඩුවේ හෝ විපක්ෂයේ හෝ ජයග්‍රහණයක් නොවෙයි. මෙය රටට ලැබුණු ජයග්‍රහණයක්. මේ රටට ලැබුණු ජයග්‍රහණය පාවිච්චි කරලා අප සියලුදෙනාම පුද්ගලිකව නැස්බි සාමිවරයාට ස්තූති ලියුමක් ලියුවොත් ඉතාම වැදගත් වෙච්චි කියා මම විශ්වාස කරනවා. අපට ලැබී තිබෙන්නේ ඉතාම අපූරු අවස්ථාවක්. මේ අවස්ථාවෙන් සම්පූර්ණයෙන් ප්‍රයෝජන ගෙන අපේ හමුදාවට තවදුරටත් අසාධාරණයන් සිදු වීම වළක්වන්න අපේ රජය කටයුතු කරාවි කියන විශ්වාසය මට තිබෙනවා කියන කාරණයත් ප්‍රකාශ කරමින් ප්‍රකාශ කරමින් විදේශ කටයුතු පිළිබඳ රාජ්‍ය අමාත්‍යවරයා වශයෙන් මට මේ අවස්ථාව ලබාදීම සම්බන්ධයෙන් ඔබතුමාට ස්තූතිවන්න වෙනවා, මූලාසනාරූඪ ගරු මන්ත්‍රීතුමනි.