



19th September, 2002



Statement of the Royal Norwegian Government

SRI LANKA PEACE TALKS

16 – 18 September 2002

The first round of formal peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was held in Sattahip, Thailand, between 16 and 18 September 2002. The negotiations were facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government.

The parties agreed that in their determination to bring the peace process forward, they are responding to the overwhelming call of the peoples of Sri Lanka to bring an end to the ethnic conflict, and create the conditions for lasting peace, prosperity, and respect for human rights.

Both parties expressed their resolve to address the full range of issues pertaining to a lasting political settlement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, fully realizing that this can best be achieved by pursuing a step-by-step approach to the negotiation process. This approach has proven successful in the establishment and implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement already in force since February. The parties recognized the need for sustaining the Ceasefire Agreement, with the continued assistance of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, which the parties commended for its impartial conduct in the fulfilment of its important mandate.

The parties affirmed their determination to continue upholding the Ceasefire Agreement and expanding the range of confidence-building measures over the period ahead. Building on the achievements of the Ceasefire Agreement, the parties agreed to establish promptly a Joint Committee to deal with the issues relating to High Security Zones, with the aim of enabling the return of larger numbers of displaced persons to their areas of origin, thereby facilitating the restoration of normalcy. This Joint Committee will consist of senior representatives of both sides, including military personnel.

The parties discussed in depth the urgent need to address the difficult humanitarian situation in the north and east of Sri Lanka. To this effect, the parties agreed to establish a Joint Task Force for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Activities. The Joint Task Force will constitute a partnership between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, and will have responsibility for the identification, financing and monitoring of urgent humanitarian and reconstruction activities in the north and east. The task force will operate with due participation of Muslims, and its work will benefit all ethnic communities of the North and East. The details relating to the mandate and structure of the Joint Task Force will rapidly be finalized between the parties with the assistance of the Norwegian facilitators. The two immediate priorities of the parties are

- (1) stepping up humanitarian mine action, and
- (2) accelerating resettlement and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons.

The parties expressed their gratitude for the extensive goodwill of the international community toward the peace process. They urged donors to provide immediate funding for humanitarian priorities. This will enhance public confidence in the peace process and thus contribute to the further progress in the quest for peace in Sri Lanka.

The parties agreed that the establishment of the Joint Task Force is a sign of the increasing level of trust between the parties, and of their willingness to work together towards the establishment of a provisional administrative structure for the north and east.

Recognizing that the way forward is a long and demanding one, the parties agreed to continuing rounds of negotiations. The next three rounds of negotiations will take place on the following dates:

31 October – 3 November 2002
2 – 5 December 2002

6 – 9 January 2003.

The parties as well as the Norwegian facilitators reiterated their appreciation to the Royal Thai Government for their kindness in providing the venue for the negotiations as well as the generous hospitality shown to the delegations.

