

Response to Hon. Nimal Siripala De Silva

WEDNESDAY 24TH JUNE 2015

Honorable Speaker,

I wish to answer the questions posed by the Hon. Leader of Opposition, relating to the US State Department Report titled 'Country Reports on Terrorism and Patterns of Global Terrorism.'

The US State Department released their Counterterrorism Report this June 2015. The report covered the calendar year 2014, during which Hon. Nimal Siripala De Silva himself was a cabinet minister in the Rajapaksa administration. It noted that a total of 13 LTTE supporters were arrested in Malaysia in 2014. Like the report that preceded it, covering the calendar year 2013, it mentioned that the LTTE's network of support continued to operate - shockingly, under the very regime that claimed to have eradicated this threat once and for all.

That LTTE groups may still have the motivation to sustain their financial and support networks five years after the end of the war is a clear indicator of the failure of the Rajapaksa administration's post-war counter-terrorism policies.

So, to answer the question posed by the Hon. Leader of Opposition, yes, the Government is well aware of the Report, which was released on the 19th of June.

Honorable Speaker,

The Report as you all know, covers developments in countries in which acts of terrorism occurred, countries that are state sponsors of terrorism, and countries determined by the Secretary of State to be of particular interest in the global war on terror. As provided in the legislation, the report reviews major developments in bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism cooperation as well.

We consider these Annual Reports extremely useful for all Governments and all organisations and agencies that are committed to combating terrorism.

Hon. Nimal Siripala De Silva has correctly pointed out that five years after the war the threat of violence may still exist. What should then be debated is not whether this government is aware of a report that has been produced every year since 2004, but

why the post-war counter-terrorism strategies of the Rajapaksa regime have failed so miserably...

It is clear that we must now employ new strategies to ensure the future security of all Sri Lankans.

Honorable Speaker,

This government's approach is very different. We are using soft power and diplomacy, while ensuring our borders remain strong and our maritime security remains firm, to win the hearts and minds of all those who may oppose the state – whatever ethnic, religious, class or cultural group they may represent. It is the government's intention to remove the base of support of violent radical groups, by diminishing their popularity and legitimacy among the populations who might otherwise sustain them with material and moral support.

Honourable Speaker,

In this regard, I wish to reiterate to this House that this Government is firm in its resolve to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. This is, and always will be our consistent policy with regard to terrorism. Our nation has been torn apart by acts of terror for several decades in its history. We are sadly all too familiar with the bombs at market places, in city centers, trains and buses, places of worship and commercial establishments. We have all been affected in some form or another by the brutal violence of a conflicted nation.

The responsibility of ensuring that this country never regresses back to an era of violence and terror is not one that should be confined to any one party, any one Government or any one leader. It should be the collective and shared responsibility of all.

Following the wide ranging consultations held, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission states very clearly in its Report, and I quote:

“The conflict could have been avoided had the southern political leaders of the two main political parties acted in the national interest and forged a consensus between them to offer an acceptable solution to the Tamil people. The Tamil political leaders were equally responsible for this conflict which could have been avoided had the Tamil leaders refrained from promoting an armed campaign towards secession, acquiescing in the violence and terrorist methods used by the LTTE against both the Sinhala and Tamil people, and failing to come out strongly and fearlessly against the LTTE, and their atrocious practices. A collective act of

contrition for what happened would not come easily to either party. It would come only if they are ready to make a profound moral self appraisal in the light of the human tragedy that has occurred.”

As you are aware Hon. Speaker,

The LTTE continues to be listed as a US government designated foreign terrorist organization.

This government is in the process of strengthening diplomatic ties with those countries that have worked with us in the past to weaken the LTTE's funding and support networks.

The USA was one of the first countries to list the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997 and also listed its front organizations such as the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (USA branch of TRO). Cooperation continues between security agencies of the USA and Sri Lanka on pending cases against LTTE operatives in the USA. The US designation was pivotal to the suppression of the LTTE, which led to their military defeat in 2009. The listing in the US and in other parts of the world prevented much needed funding from reaching the LTTE, which was essential for the carrying out of its terrorist activities in Sri Lanka.

Honorable Speaker,

The Hon. Leader of Opposition wishes to know whether the Government is vigilant and is taking necessary precautions in dealing with the LTTE and entities connected to the LTTE. He wishes to know whether the Government is examining the activities of such entities and taking necessary steps.

I would like to remind Hon. Nimal Siripala De Silva, that our Government agencies maintain close cooperation in intelligence sharing with all interlocutors, particularly those committed to combating terrorism. This includes combating financial networks. The Government of Sri Lanka continues to maintain its partnership with the US Department of State, Homeland Security, Defence, and Energy on securing the country's maritime border. The US Coast Guard, under the Department of State's Export Control and Related Border Security programme, continues to train Sri Lankan Coast Guard and Navy personnel on border and export control matters, and the Sri Lankan Government continues to cooperate with US Customs and Border Protection through the Container Security Initiative.

In addition, our Government continues to collaborate with the EU Immigration Department on an Advanced Passenger Information System, which transmits passenger information to Sri Lankan immigration officials upon arrival. And further, Sri Lanka is also one of 85 partner nations in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

Honorable Speaker,

This Government is firm in its resolve to uphold the safety and security of all the citizens of this country.

All Government agencies responsible for security and intelligence as well as my Ministry have maintained a consistent policy of combating terrorism for decades. The listing of the LTTE by the European Union was originally done in 2006 during the time I was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Subsequently, as you know, the listing was suspended in October 2014. However, the European Council decision 2015/521 of 26 March this year, 2015, updated and amended the list of persons once again, placing the LTTE back on the list.

The Report of the US State Department identifies Sri Lanka and India as the area of operation of the LTTE. As you are aware, the LTTE remains banned in both countries.

Honorable Speaker,

Since the 8th of January, those who had given up faith have now once again begun to bear renewed hope of true reconciliation, of durable peace, and of dignity and prosperity for all. People of Sri Lankan origin who had fled this land and had ceased to dream of a united, reconciled Sri Lanka are now unafraid to dream once more of a land of peace, harmony and success. Those who were once reluctant to pledge their commitment to a united Sri Lanka are now reconsidering their stances.

We owe it to our nation to keep distinct those who espouse a violent separatist agenda from those who express concern about the welfare of the Tamil people. We must not confuse those who raise funds through illegal activities to promote their violent agendas with those who voice concern about the displaced or the detained. This distinction is important if our country is to turn its back on its violent past for good. Engagement and dialogue are essential to ensure that those who hold dissenting views are heard and that those who suffer grievances may resolve them without having to resort to violence.

As His Excellency the President said on the 19th of May this year, at the conclusion of the conflict in May 2009, we failed to mend the hearts and minds of the people of our country. This nation's twin agenda henceforth should be reconciliation and

development. Our mission should be not only to mend hearts and minds of our citizens, but to unite them in the spirit of an undivided Sri Lanka.

Honorable Speaker,

The moderate voices of Tamil politics, and the genuine representatives of the Tamil people, the TNA, are now strong advocates for a united undivided Sri Lanka – these are the individuals we should encourage to participate more fully within our democratic institutions, and with whom we must work closely to eradicate the radical elements within our society. Just as the JVP was brought in to mainstream politics, we must now empower the Tamil people to express their grievances through their elected representatives, through credible state mechanisms and through non-violent advocacy.

New forms of terrorism that may emerge if we isolate and radicalize aggrieved communities in our country will be difficult to predict and may be hard to control. They would be difficult targets for any military especially if they are small or geographically dispersed. We cannot afford to risk the security and stability of our country again on poorly planned or non-inclusive strategies, and on failures in diplomacy. Now is the time to address the root causes of violence, to use global law enforcement cooperation, to improve domestic criminal justice systems and to increase outreach to affected communities. These will be the tools with which we permanently steal away the hearts and minds, the very oxygen, from terrorist organizations.

Therefore, I urge the Honourable Leader of Opposition to join us in this journey of confidence building, reconciliation and development. Join us to address the real grievances and concerns of people of all communities, especially the minority communities in the North and the East. This is the surest way to ensure that terrorism will not raise its head in this country again.