

Program in Support of the Sri Lanka peace Process

At the conclusion of the third set of peace talks - in Oslo, ending on December 5, 2002 - the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or LTTE, achieved a breakthrough by agreeing that their common goal was a federal constitutional arrangement for Sri Lanka. During the most recent round of peace talks - in Hakone, Japan, ending on March 21, 2003 - both parties reiterated their commitment to develop a federal system based on internal self-determination within a united Sri Lanka. The parties have invited the Forum of Federations to provide face-to-face consultations on federalism during the seventh session of talks in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Forum is conducting activities on two different tracks:

Track 1 is the closed-door consultation to the negotiating parties, which started, in effect, in Oslo. Both parties are requesting expert advice on a regular basis - in association with the negotiating sessions, which are taking place monthly.

Mr. Bob Rae, former Premier of Ontario and constitutional lawyer, and Dr. David Cameron, Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto and former Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs of Ontario, are meeting regularly with Minister G. L. Peiris, lead negotiator of the Sri Lankan government, and Dr. Anton Balasingham, lead negotiator of the LTTE. The Forum has provided technical expertise to key stakeholders during the margins of the fourth, fifth and sixth rounds of peace talks. In addition to this, the Forum has met with the LTTE political committee in the North to speak about the basics of federalism.

Track 2 consists of public education activities in Sri Lanka.

The Forum and its local partner, the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) have implemented a second round of public education activities in Sri Lanka in March 2003. Dr. Nicholas Haysom, constitutional advisor to Nelson Mandela, Dr. Peter Meekison, former Deputy Minister of Alberta, and Dr. Sujit Choudhry, Canadian constitutional expert, spoke to a wide spectrum of Sri Lankan civil society - religious and minority groups, civil servants, journalists and peace advocates. The focus of discussion centered around the meaning of federalism, minority rights in federalism, fiscal federalism, law and order issues, different models of federalism, peace process issues, truth and reconciliation and related issues.

- revised April 7, 2003