

Speech by Deepak Obhrai, M.P.
and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
at Sri Lanka's National Day celebrations on February 8th 2012
Ottawa

Sri Lankan National Day event: "Glimpse of Serendipity"

Good evening, Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a great pleasure to join you this evening to celebrate Sri Lanka's National Day. I have had the privilege of visiting Sri Lanka in the past and can speak personally to all that it has to offer in terms of natural beauty, its rich cultural heritage, and the warmth of its people. Sri Lanka's ethnic and linguistic diversity is remarkable, with Sinhalese and Tamil speaking communities, comprising of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims contributing to Sri Lanka's national identity. Tonight, we are privileged to have the opportunity to enjoy a "Glimpse of Serendipity" together.

Canada and Sri Lanka have shared close ties for decades. We were proud to open our High Commission in Colombo nearly sixty years ago, following Sri Lanka's independence.

Canada has looked to build on that friendship by supporting the Sri Lankan people with over \$800 million in assistance since the 1950's. This includes \$5.5 million in funding announced in 2011 to support Sri Lanka in implementing its national languages policy. Canada's contribution of locomotives, and our assistance in the construction of the country's Colombo International Airport and the Canada-Sri Lanka Friendship Road leading to the city centre serve as a monument to the ties between our two countries. But true friends also stand together and help each other in times of need. Canada has helped Sri Lanka face terrible disasters, including contributing more than \$27 million dollars of humanitarian assistance in the past three years to assist Sri Lankans displaced at the end of the conflict or affected by extreme flooding.

There is also a deeper dynamic to our friendship thanks to Canada's vibrant Sri Lankan population and its contribution to the fabric of Canadian society. Canada

is home to one of the largest communities of Sri Lankans outside of Sri Lanka itself made of Tamil Sri Lankans.

Canada recognizes the tremendous challenges facing Sri Lanka as you emerge from decades of conflict. We believe that the most pressing challenge at this important juncture is to resolve the underlying sources of conflict through political reconciliation. A political solution, including the devolution of power, must be a cornerstone in this process.

It is with this in mind that Canada urges the Sri Lankan government to implement the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission. Outlining a clear road-map and timelines for doing so would represent an important step forward in fostering political reconciliation.

For this process to be effective and enduring, however, a credible process of accountability must also be undertaken. It will be critical to establish an independent investigation to address the issue of accountability and allegations of human rights violations.

I further call upon members of Canada's Sri Lankan Tamil community to develop creative ideas about how to contribute constructively and collaboratively to a new era in Sri Lanka's history.

Canada would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with Sri Lanka on the next steps required to foster sustainable peace and prosperity in your beautiful country.

I look forward to enjoying the evening with you tonight and thank the Sri Lankan High Commission for arranging this wonderful event.

Enjoy!