

DOCUMENTS - I

On October 04, 2004, President Chandrika Kumaratunga inaugurated the National Advisory Council for Peace and Reconciliation. This Council is meant to be a consultative forum for all political parties, religious groups and civil society organizations. However the United National Party, the Tamil National Alliance and Jathika Hela Urumaya boycotted the inauguration. The following are excerpts from the text of the speech delivered by Douglas Devananda, MP and Minister, the leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party. The EPDP is a constituent party of the ruling UPFA coalition.

Readers may note that these proposals for power-sharing have been presented by the EPDP in a context of the LTTE's proposals for an interim self-government authority. Minister Devananda's proposals also offer a framework which is much wider than the constitutional proposals of President Kumaratunga's People's Alliance government formulated in 1995, 1996 and 2000.

EPDP'S PROPOSALS FOR PEACE

Douglas Devananda, MP

I had been a gun-carrying militant leader. I had fought the armed forces of the Sri Lankan state. I fought for the establishment of a sovereign independent state comprising the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. I am also one of the many Tamil militants who gave up the armed struggle for the establishment of a sovereign independent state and joined the democratic mainstream of Sri Lanka following the Indo Sri Lanka Agreement of 29th July 1987.

"I am one of the many Tamil militants, who, after the signing of the Indo Sri Lanka Agreement, were convinced that our armed struggle had proved the point that the Sri Lankan State could not continue to deny the legitimate rights of the Tamil people, and that it would henceforth be possible for the Tamil people to live as equals with the Sinhalese and the Muslims within a united Sri Lanka, if substantial devolution of powers to the Provinces could be guaranteed by the Constitution.

"What the vast majority of the Tamil people of this country are yearning for is an honourable political solution within a united Sri Lanka, based on devolution of powers to the Provinces. Having taken note of this yearning of the Tamil people, the Eelam People's Democratic Party has right along clearly spelt out its solution to the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight what we consider should be the salient features of such a solution:

(i) Substantial powers to be devolved to the Provinces through a new Constitution.

(ii) The Northern and Eastern Provinces of this country to be permanently merged as a single North-East Province.

(iii) Special constitutional arrangements to be provided to safeguard the interests of the Muslims and the Sinhalese who live in substantial numbers in the North-East Province.

(iv) The North-East Province to be bestowed with asymmetric devolution of powers in view of its distinctiveness.

(v) Police powers to be fully devolved on the Provinces.

(vi) Provincial Governments to have the right to negotiate for and enter into agreements in respect of foreign loans and donor funds for development.

(vii) Sri Lanka to be a secular state.

(viii) The national flag of Sri Lanka to adequately reflect the multi-ethnic character of Sri Lanka.

(ix) The national anthem of Sri Lanka to be recognised as having equal validity in both Sinhala and Tamil.

(x) Sri Lanka is to have a non-executive President and a non-executive Vice President, both of them not belonging to the same ethnic group at any one time.

(xi) The armed forces of Sri Lanka to reflect the ethnic composition of the country.

(xii) Both the Sinhala and Tamil languages to enjoy the status of official languages of the country.

(xiii) The Parliament of Sri Lanka to consist of two Houses, the House of Representatives and the House of the Provinces, and, both Houses to reflect to ethnic composition of the country.

(xiv) Every Provincial Legislature to reflect the ethnic composition of that Province.

(xv) All citizens of Sri Lanka living abroad to be provided facilities to exercise their franchise.

(xvi) The North-East Province to be conferred the right to establish cultural and trade interest sections in Sri Lankan missions abroad.

(xvii) The Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal to reflect the ethnic composition of the country.

(xviii) The Provincial Governments to have a say in the appointment of judges to the lower courts of justice."