

**Visit by Madam Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga,
former President and Chairperson of UNUR**

Economic Engagement Programme

at the Conference Hall at Divisional Secretariat, Tellipalai

on 25.03.2017 at 10.30 am

Chief Minister's Address

Guru Brahma

Hon' Madam Chandrika, Hon' Governor, Hon' Guests of Honour, including the Members of Parliament and Northern provincial Council, the Jaffna Government Agent, the Director General of ONUR, Distinguished Guests, High officials from Provincial as well as Central Administrations, my dear brothers and sisters,

It gives me pleasure to welcome Madam Chandrika on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Economic Engagement Programme initiated and implement by the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation. Events are earmarked here in Tellipalai then at Chankanai, Karaveddy and Point Pedro. Many projects that are helpful to our people are being inaugurated. The construction of Primary Health Care Centre at Palai Veemankamam, construction of Fisheries Auction Centre at Chulipuram West at Chankanai, Renovation of Anaivilunthan Tank and Channel at Udupiddy South, Opening of the Rural Water Supply scheme at Polikandy South, Point Pedro are some of the events among others that are to be undertaken today by Madam Chandrika.

The works undertaken are no doubt important but quite delayed in undertaking considering the fact that eight long years have passed since the end of the war. Our people are quite conscious of the urgency of addressing the impact of the war on them and on the environment and landscape around. But at the same time they are concerned about the delay in addressing the questions of accountability and justice too.

Some of us feel and here I reflect the views and concerns of a large section of our people that there are insufficient action so far reflecting a commitment towards reconciliation. While addressing the physical economic needs and other logistical necessities it is incumbent that the basic factors that gave rise to schism among us are also addressed. Discrimination and a hegemonic attitude on the part of the Centre led to our initial disagreements and unpleasantness. It was the snowballing effect of such negative attitudes which led to violence. When violence was brought to an end with International help the means adopted at the tail end by our powers that be were dubious and brutal.

It is not enough to say war is violent and brutal. Even in war there are standards laid down internationally to be followed. Not to have followed them requires adequate after action. That is the accountability and justice our people are craving for. The reluctance of the powers that be to take adequate steps with regard to War Crimes committed and the attempt to shove the past under the carpet so to say leaves our people wondering whether the Good Governance Government is indeed interested in reconciliation and unity.

I always refer to the first improper violent act committed on or around the 5th of June 1956 at Inginiyagala. Immediate action taken irrespective of who was involved would have prevented the culture of impunity that grew to gigantic proportions later. Instead of empathizing with the victims we had sympathized the perpetrators of violence. If the Government oblivious of who committed them and against whom, identified the criminal acts and took immediate action we could have saved this Country from the impasse it went through.

That is why we have been agitating for our participation in the processes adopted for reconciliation. Reconciliation demands the participation of those affected freely and dignifiedly. Our participation does not mean our officials. They are beholden to the Centre. The political representatives of our people should be made to participate

right from the beginning. Merely to look into the physical needs of our people is inadequate. Their feelings need to be assuaged.

We have been therefore critical about the preparation of the Peace Building Priority Plan Framework in that many matters that need to have been given adequate attention and importance have not been included therein. Just to refer to some -

1. Our requests to bring us into the process fell on deaf ears. Even now it is not too late to include us. How would you implement the framework when the key stakeholder is not a part to it?
2. The framework has no reference to War Crimes' accountability
3. There has been no reference to the inclusion of War Crimes jurisdiction into our Law
4. Demilitarisation, High Security Zones, Security Sector Reforms should have been included into the framework
5. The need to withdraw Prevention of Terrorism Act should have been reiterated and helped to be withdrawn
6. Role of the Diaspora should have been included
7. Sustainable Development Goals could have been made the corner stones of our future development

Thus the hardship of our people and their aspirations have not been adequately understood. There is a feeling of “serves them right” pervading the psyche of the powers that be. The extent to which I saw the spirit of empathy engulfing the Toronto Mayor, John Tory who visited us last Sunday, I have failed to see among our local people both Sinhalese and Tamils. Sympathy I do see. But very little empathy do I perceive.

People fall at my feet and ask me – “Please find our dear ones, whom we ourselves handed over to the Military”. “Where are they?” “What happened to them?” - They cry and ask. What answer do I give them? Many of the parents who demonstrate at

Kilinochchi or Keppapilavu are suffering from many ailments and aches and pains. Diabetes, high blood pressure, heart ailments and other ailments daunt them. I have seen them taking their medicines while being seated in their hurriedly constructed temporary sheds, exposed to the inclement morning weather and the scorching afternoon heat.

Accountability concerns them. They seek to know whether their dear ones are living or dead. The Office of Missing Persons was designed but not given a lease of life to operate. The committees sat on constitutional reforms but their Reports were withheld. Now that such deliberate delays have given a new lease of life to the Government at Geneva, let us sit down in earnest, despite the disappointments of the distressed, to seek solutions to many problems that beset us. High time the Keppapilavu people are sent back to their traditional habitations. So too the people here in Tellipalai and surrounding areas and where so ever still languishing in camps and so called welfare centres. Let there be a concerted effort at demilitarization. Let there be adequate projects addressing the special needs of the affected sections of our Society. There were many matters identified in the Consensus Resolution at Geneva in 2015. We need to refer back to our commitments.

I refer to these not to underestimate the work done by ONUR to the affected people. I refer to them since a substantial change in attitudes and a possible buildup of trust could be achieved by attending to the psychological injuries caused by the war at its concluding stages through brutality and extortion by sections of the armed forces. Under the good governance Government there were glaring incidents of violence and extortion which were brought to my notice while I was abroad. The War crimes' inquiry is necessary to bring out the truth of brutality and cruelty among human beings. It is improper to shove it under the carpet just because those who committed belong to particular ethnic groups. So let us ensure that while we indulge in many programmes of work which helps our people in their day to day activities we also

take adequate steps to address the basic causes for the conflict and identify the urgent needs of those affected.

I thank Madam Chandrika for inviting me to this function and let me hope all her attempts and activities would promote peace and reconciliation among our conflicting Communities.

Thank you.

Justice C.V.Wigneswaran
Chief Minister
Northern Province