

Parliamentary Secretary Obhrai Reflects on Visit to Sri Lanka

November 17, 2013 - The Honourable Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, has concluded his visit to Sri Lanka. Mr. Obhrai was in Colombo to represent Canada at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting from November 15 to 17.

“Canada believes that the Commonwealth has an important role to play in promoting freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. But these efforts are undermined when member countries consistently fail to live up to those same values.

“During my visit, I took the opportunity to meet with people on the ground in Colombo and in Jaffna in the north. This experience only strengthened my conviction that Canada was absolutely right to take the principled stance that it did.”

Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced in October that he would not attend the Commonwealth meeting in Colombo. This decision came after Canada repeatedly voiced concerns over Sri Lanka’s failure to demonstrate its commitment to the Commonwealth’s core values and principles, which are outlined in the organization’s Charter, adopted last year and signed last March by Her Majesty the Queen, as the Head of the Commonwealth.

Canada welcomed the decision by prime ministers Singh of India and Ramgoolam of Mauritius not to attend the Commonwealth meeting. The absence of the prime ministers, leaders of two of Sri Lanka’s Indian Ocean neighbours, sends an important message. Almost half of all Commonwealth heads of government did not attend the summit and sent representatives instead.

On the margins of the Commonwealth meeting, Mr. Obhrai:

- honoured Canadian Armed Forces personnel past and present by laying a wreath at the Commonwealth War Graves Liveramentu Cemetery;
- visited the offices of the frequently attacked daily newspaper *Uthayan* and met with its owner, who is also a member of Sri Lanka’s parliament, and its editor;
- participated in round-table discussions on human rights, freedom of expression and religious minorities, and the rule of law;
- met with the Most Reverend Thomas Savundranayagam, the Catholic bishop of Jaffna; and
- met with Chief Minister of the Northern Province, Canagasabapathy Visuvalingam Wigneswaran, Tamil National Alliance.

Mr. Obhrai reiterated Canadian support for inclusive post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation to enable all Sri Lankans to live in freedom and security.

Canada will continue to work with its partners to uphold the Commonwealth’s core values, which are cherished by Canadians. It will also continue to call for the Government of Sri Lanka to implement fully the recommendations of its own Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and to respect human rights and the rule of law.

- 30 -

For further information, media representatives may contact:

Media Relations Office
Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada
613-995-1874

media@international.gc.ca

Follow us on Twitter: [@DFATDCanada](https://twitter.com/DFATDCanada)