

## **Departing Canadian MP Bob Rae has this to say**

Making a personal statement, Canadian Parliamentarian Bob Rae, who was refused entry into Sri Lanka last night (June 9), says that he had ‘successfully applied to the Sri Lankan High Commission for a visa and had discussed my visit with the Sri Lankan Commissioner, the Canadian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, and with officials from DFAIT’.

In addition Mr. Rae concludes, “What they now also know is that the government of Sri Lanka is afraid of dialogue, afraid of discussion, afraid of engagement. All I can say is shame on them. If this is how they treat me, imagine how they treat people who can’t speak out and who can’t make public statements.

I shall have more to say on my return to Canada.” Personal Statement by Hon Bob Rae PC, MP, on being refused entry into Sri Lanka at the Colombo Airport.

On the evening of Tuesday June 9, 2009 I arrived on a flight from Delhi to Colombo, Sri Lanka. I had successfully applied to the Sri Lankan High Commission for a visa and had discussed my visit with the Sri Lankan Commissioner, the Canadian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, and with officials from DFAIT.

When I arrived at immigration in the company of two Canadian High Commission officials I was, after some delay, told that I was being refused entry “on the grounds of national intelligence”.

Since that time I have spent over twelve hours at the airport trying to find a reason for this decision. I have had the full support of officials here and in Ottawa. The Government of Sri Lanka is sticking to its position, and I am being put on a plane to London at 1:15 pm Sri Lankan time. I shall be back in Canada some time Thursday.

I have been involved in Sri Lanka for over a decade, first as Chairman of the Forum of Federations, and later as a Member of Parliament. I have travelled extensively throughout the country, and have met many times with its political leaders, of all parties. During the peace process I obviously met with LTTE officials who were involved in those discussions.

I also met with all political parties, with a wide spectrum of opinions. My many trips to Sri Lanka, and my work in Canada as well as the peace process post 2001 were intended to work to a peaceful solution. To that end I have met with people of all views I have never in any way felt that the violent tactics of the LTTE were in any way the right course, and I have made that view known on many occasions, including debates in parliament. To describe me as “an LTTE supporter”, as an Army spokesman has done today, is a lie, pure and simple.

A review of my record would also show that I have been a champion of moderate Tamil opinion and Tamil dissent. I have been a steady critic of the abuses of human rights that

were part of the LTTE's tactics, and have spoken about this unhesitatingly in Canada and abroad. I spoke at memorial services for both Lakshman Kadirgamar, the former Foreign Minister, and Ketesh Loganathan, who worked at the Sri Lankan peace secretariat, both of whom were personal friends.

I am clearly not welcome here to discuss the humanitarian situation and the future of reconciliation in this country. But the government of Sri Lanka knew my views, and granted me a visa. I have flown a very long way only to be told the door is firmly shut.

The Sri Lankan government has made this decision because they have apparently reached some ill-conceived and defamatory conclusions about me. But after thirty years of public service at home and abroad I have to say this decision reflects on them, and not on me. I have fought against violence and extremism all my life. Everyone knows that, and the record of my actions, speeches and reports is there for all to see.

What they now also know is that the government of Sri Lanka is afraid of dialogue, afraid of discussion, afraid of engagement. All I can say is shame on them. If this is how they treat me, imagine how they treat people who can't speak out and who can't make public statements.

I shall have more to say on my return to Canada.

**Source:** Lankasri News, Thursday, 11 June 2009, 06:30.35 AM GMT +05:30