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'Ceasefire will lead to more terrorism'

Sri Lankan Ambassador to the US Jaliya Wickramasuriya told a May 6 gathering of the Atlantic Council, a Washington, D.C. think tank, that a ceasefire with the cornered LTTE will only lead to more terrorism.

Speaking in a program entitled "Sri Lanka" Beyond Terrorism," Ambassador Wickramasuriya outlined the Government's ambitious plans for reconstruction and reconciliation in northern Sri Lanka, where Government Forces have trapped the last remnants of the Tamil Tiger force.

Ambassador Wickramasuriya noted that the LTTE are holding 15,000-20,000 civilians as a human shield, and that the Government's advance has actually allowed 111,000 of those civilians to flee the Tigers.

In response to a question about allegations that the Government is shelling civilians, Ambassador Wickramasuriya replied, "We 100 percent deny shelling," people trapped in the conflict zone.

Ambassador Wickramasuriya also addressed a question about the role of a United Nations brokered ceasefire. There are fears, he said, that a third-party negotiator will simply be held hostage by the Tigers, "and then we will have a bigger problem."

A ceasefire, he said, will only allow the Tigers to "rearm, regroup and reposition," among civilians. A video that Ambassador Wickramasuriya showed displayed Tiger terrorists taking positions among civilians encampments in the small, 2-square mile conflict zone.

"There is no guarantee that a ceasefire will cause the release of the trapped civilians," he said. "Those innocent people are right now the best weapon the Tigers have. They will not give it away. They have already said so. The Tigers have also said that they will not surrender."

'The Tigers know they are finished, so the lifeline of a ceasefire will only bring more years of terrorism in Sri Lanka.'

The Atlantic Council's program reflects Washington's heightened interest in the conflict in Sri Lanka. Other guests asked about post-conflict elections in the north - Ambassador Wickramasuriya noted the country's positive experience with regional elections in the Eastern Province - as well as Sri Lanka's request for reconstruction aid.

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The Ambassador noted that demining will be a priority in the north, where the LTTE has sown thousands of landmines around villages.

He noted that damaged water and sanitation facilities, roads, rail lines, bridges, hospitals, schools and government offices will be repaired, along with 80,000 houses.

Ambassador Wickramasuriya also discussed the role that the U.S. Agency for International Development has played in Sri Lanka, and the hope that five vocational training centres will be established with USAID help in the five regions of the North.

"Sri Lanka is the oldest democracy in Asia," the Ambassador said. "We have never had a military government."

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SRI LANKA

Peace Process of

"Our President Mahinda Rajapaksa, is doing what the people of Sri Lanka want. They have suffered enough.

"They have lost their loved ones. They are tired of terrorism."

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