



EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) to Sri Lanka - 2005

For the 17 November Presidential Elections

Colombo, 28 October 2005

Cushnahan criticizes the failure to act on previous EU EOM recommendations for strengthening the democratic process. He also drew attention to the problems that could arise if serious malpractices were to occur that could fundamentally alter the outcome of the 2005 Presidential elections.

John Cushnahan, Chief Observer of European Union Election Observation Mission, was speaking at a press conference today 28 October 2005 in Colombo Sri Lanka said:

"The European Union has enthusiastically supported Sri Lanka throughout the various crises it has experienced in recent years. It has provided substantial moral and financial support to underpin the peace process including the Tokyo Donor Conference. It has also provided immediate assistance in the wake of the tsunami disaster. In addition the EU has deployed election observation missions on three separate occasions in 2000, 2001 and 2004 to assist the democratic process in Sri Lanka. And I am pleased that once again the EU has responded to your invitation by sending this current Election Observation Mission.

"But it has to be said that the EU is clearly frustrated with the lack of follow-up to our previous election observation missions. None of the key recommendations of the previous three missions to strengthen the democratic process have been implemented. They have merely been left on the shelf gathering dust.

"EU resources are not unlimited and ever increasing demands are made on our budget. We have seen evidence of this recently following the tragic earthquake in South Asia. And as there and anywhere else in the world where disasters strike, we are committed to responding wherever we can hope to make a difference.

"However, as a friend of Sri Lanka, it would be remiss of me not to point out that if, at the end of this election, no attempt is made to implement our recommendations, any future requests from Sri Lanka for election observation is likely to fall on deaf ears.

"If I can now make some points about the forthcoming presidential election itself. The last EU election observation mission was particularly pleased that, unlike the preceding two elections, the 2004 general election was largely conducted in a democratic manner apart from the north and east, with much less violence and intimidation. I would like to once again acknowledge the contribution of the established political parties for helping bring this about. I hope that they will continue their best efforts to ensure the same will be true of the current election.

"My team and I look forward to working with all the candidates, their party supporters, civil society and especially the Election Commissioner and his staff with whom we have enjoyed excellent cooperation during previous missions.

"We are here at your invitation. We will fulfill our brief to be fully independent and to honestly report on the outcome of the election.

"In this context, I would like to make it absolutely clear that, if serious malpractices or incidents occur which fundamentally alter the outcome of this election, I will have no hesitation in issuing a very critical report."

for further information: www.eueomsrilanka.org

EU Election Observation Mission - Hotel TransAsia - Colombo - tel. (94-11) 24.91.000