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India-Sri Lanka Joint Press Communique on Ministerial level talks on fishermen issues

January 02, 2017

India and Sri Lanka held Ministerial level talks on fishermen issues today, 2 January 2017 in Colombo. Minister of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare of India Mr. Radha Mohan Singh met with Minister for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka Mr. Mahinda Amaraweera. The talks followed the first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on fisheries held in New Delhi on 31 December 2016. The JWG, constituted in pursuance of the decision taken at the Ministerial meeting held in New Delhi on 5 November 2016, was co-chaired by Secretary (Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries), India and Secretary (Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development), Sri Lanka.

The Ministers exchanged views on possible mechanisms to help find a permanent solution to the fishermen issues. The co-chairs of the JWG briefed the Ministers on the outcome of the first JWG meeting for consideration of the Ministers and further directions to take the process forward.

Both sides agreed to a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to expedite the release and handing over of fishermen in each other's custody on completion of respective legal and procedural formalities. The immediate release of the fishermen presently in custody was announced following the ministerial level talks.

As part of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) agreed to by both sides, it was decided to intensify cooperation on patrolling and to institute periodic interaction between the Coast Guard of the two countries. An understanding was reached to ensure that there was no physical harm or loss of life while apprehending fishermen by Navy and Coast Guard of the two countries. It was agreed to explore the possibility of introducing effective tracking systems for the fishing vessels and making the use of onboard communication equipment mandatory.

The Ministers appreciated the efforts taken by the JWG in operationalizing the "Hotline" between Indian and Sri Lankan Coast Guard, which would ensure quick decision making and response.

Both sides discussed the issue of releasing fishing vessels in each other's custody. The Indian side requested for the immediate release of Indian fishing vessels. The Sri Lankan side agreed to consider the request in view of the progress being made by the JWG.

The Sri Lankan side reiterated that the practice of bottom trawling needs to end at the earliest. The Indian side assured that bottom trawling would be phased out in a graded time-bound manner within a practicable timeframe keeping in mind the capacity building of the fishermen who have to be diversified into deep sea fishing as well as other coastal fisheries activities including mariculture, pearl farming, seaweed culture, etc. The Sri Lankan side was briefed about the measures already instituted including the decision to construct a new fishing harbour at Mookaiyur in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu, and the capacity building programme for Indian fishermen on deep sea fishing that commences tomorrow at Chennai and Kochi.

The next JWG meeting will be held in Colombo in April 2017 to review the progress made in addressing the fishermen issues in a comprehensive manner.

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