



47th Session of the Human Rights Council
Agenda Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health

Statement by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
23 June 2021

Madam President,

Sri Lanka notes the report presented by the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.

The loss of lives and livelihoods and impediments to economic and social development due to the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated poverty, inequality and suffering, with serious consequences on the physical and mental health of billions around the world.

Recovery from this pandemic as well as prevention of a resurgence requires equitable access to diagnostics and therapeutics including vaccines, as well as adherence to other preventive measures. Despite early calls by the UN Secretary General and world leaders for international cooperation and solidarity in the response to the pandemic and for Covid-19 products to be considered global public goods, as we speak, millions of people from developing and least developed countries have been left behind due to unequal distribution of vaccines.

The remarkably swift production of vaccines has unfortunately not been followed with equitable distribution, and the objective of early vaccination of 20% of the population globally, including those at high risk, still remains unachieved. In this respect, we welcome recent pledges by several countries to share surplus doses of vaccines with Covax. It is also necessary to scale up the production of Covid-19 vaccines, through the sharing of expertise and technology for the common good, with maximizing the production of vaccines preceding the pursuit of profit, particularly during a pandemic.

Madame President,

Since 1953, Sri Lanka has guaranteed free universal healthcare to all its people, through one of the highest per capita health expenditures in the region. To contain the pandemic, Sri Lanka adopted an inclusive, non-discriminatory and holistic approach, which was commended by the World Health Organisation, with the objective of safeguarding the health and safety of not only its people but foreign nationals in its territory.

We successfully controlled the first and second waves of Covid-19 in the country by adherence to key public health principles including case detection, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine. The Government of Sri Lanka is presently addressing the third wave with the detection of new variants and striving to save lives and livelihoods through a combination of public health measures and a simultaneous vaccination campaign.

In view of the importance of paying due attention to the physical and mental health of persons affected by the pandemic, significant steps have been taken to address the psychosocial distress among the general public as well as for the wellbeing of frontline and health workers. Guidelines have also been issued to primary care physicians for the management of mental disorders. New helplines in addition to the currently available ones have been established, which will be resourced by trained mental health professionals including specialist mental health professionals. Several institutionalized centers to manage Covid positive persons with mental disorders have been set up to safeguard rights and to optimize the management. Special clinics are being conducted for persons with mental disorders, including other non-communicable diseases in travel restricted (lock down) areas in order to minimize relapses.

While paying urgent attention to saving lives in developing and least developing nations by ensuring equitable access to vaccines, to mitigate the long-term effects of the pandemic, it is necessary to provide support for those affected to restore their livelihoods and to build back economies. It is only through collective action that we can overcome this pandemic and work towards better preparedness to ensure that such outbreaks do not become pandemics in the future.

I thank you.