



Statement by Sri Lanka
Human Rights Council 22nd Session
Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on Minorities
12 March 2013

Mr. President,

My delegation takes note of the report of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Rita Izsák.

Sri Lanka has a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural social fabric and the different communities have been co-existing in the country for centuries. It must be emphasized that Sri Lanka's Constitution, drafted 14 years before the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, recognizes the nation's communal diversity and enshrines all the fundamental human freedoms that the global community strives to uphold, which are firmly rooted in the provision that no citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any such grounds.

Mr. President,

As a country which has recently emerged from a 30-year protracted terrorist conflict, we are acutely aware of the manner in which racial and other monolithic ideologies can be manipulated by extremist elements

seeking to foster fascist, separatist agendas and engender hatred and intolerance, which threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. This has made us all the more cognizant of the importance of protecting our shared cultural heritage and consolidating peace.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka has enshrined Sinhala and Tamil as the national as well as the official languages, and English as the link language. Any citizen has the right to use any one of the three languages in their correspondence with public institutions, and has the right to receive a response in the same language. In this regard, the Government grants incentives to enhance productivity in the Public Service through the proficiency acquired by Public Servants for the discharge of duties in both official languages, and to minimize the problems relating to the use of official languages.

Compliance with the Official Languages Policy of the State is monitored and supervised by the Official Languages Commission, which is entitled to recommend principles of policy relating to the use of the Official Languages.

The Ten Year National Plan for a Trilingual Sri Lanka (2012-2021), launched in January 2012 presents an all-encompassing strategy on the language policy of the State. As part of this policy, Sinhala, Tamil and English language capacities are being enhanced within the public service, the security forces and the police.

Mr President,

We are conscious that despite the many positive developments, challenges still remain and we will continue to strive for the realization of an integrally pluralistic society. The Action Plan of the domestic reconciliation mechanism, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission and the National Human Rights Action Plan seeks to consolidate efforts to promote the concept of unity in diversity in Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, Mr. President, my delegation wishes to reiterate its commitment to foster the rights of minorities in Sri Lanka, as an integral part of the ongoing national reconciliation process.

I thank you, Mr President.