



**24th Session of the HRC
Statement by Sri Lanka – Item 9
General Debate**

Mr. President,

The delegation of Sri Lanka notes with appreciation the Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its Twelfth Session (A/HRC/24/52). We agree with the Working Group that access to education and promotion of cultural rights are vital for the elimination of racial discrimination.

Sri Lanka has a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious social fabric, which contributes to the rich and diverse identity of its people. The rights of all of our citizens, including the freedom of religion and belief, are enshrined in the Constitution.

Sri Lanka is also home to a small community of people of African descent. Like all Sri Lankan citizens, they too enjoy the rights and privileges enshrined in the Constitution. The Government has launched several initiatives to preserve their cultural identity, including their musical heritage, which has had a strong influence on the popular 'baila' music of Sri Lanka.

Mr. President,

We understand that access to education to all ethnic groups in the country is vital towards eliminating discrimination. The Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees all persons the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels. Free education for all children, from primary to university levels, was introduced in 1945, for which a legal framework was enforced. It is compulsory for a child to obtain a school education and the duty is cast on all parents to ensure that a child, no less than 5 years and no more than 14 years, receives an education.

Mr. President,

We note the convening of the 5th session of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards from 22 July to 2 August this year, where we welcomed, inter alia, a discussion on new trends in racism and related intolerance which we are witnessing today. We recognize the need to address at the global level contemporary manifestations of racial discrimination such as xenophobia and related intolerance.

In conclusion, we reiterate our strong commitment to the core principles of equality and non-discrimination embodied in the DDPA.

Thank you.