



44th Session of the Human Rights Council
Agenda Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the annual report of the High Commissioner

02 July 2020

Statement by Sri Lanka

Madam President,

Sri Lanka welcomes the presentation by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Annual Report of her Office for 2019. We appreciate the initiatives taken by the Office to provide technical and financial assistance to States upon request, and highlight the need for equitable geographical representation in the Office. In continuation of our commitment to constructive engagement, Sri Lanka will be making a voluntary contribution of USD 5000 to the Office of the High Commissioner in 2020.

Sri Lanka also notes the oral update provided to this Council by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Tuesday, on COVID-19 related human rights implications in the world. We welcome the High Commissioner's request for greater international solidarity in recovering from the pandemic, especially her call to recognize a future COVID-19 vaccine as 'a global public good', and the call for easing or suspension of sanctions that hinder pandemic-related relief.

As a country that has guaranteed free universal healthcare to all its people since 1953, through one of the highest per capita health expenditures in its region, Sri Lanka has been able to successfully contain the spread of COVID-19 through a balanced, multi-sectoral approach.

Swift preventive measures at the national level, a well-networked, multi-stakeholder contact tracing mechanism, and a robust healthcare system geared towards screening / testing and hospitalized care, have helped to ensure zero social transmission of COVID-19 in the country since 1 May 2020. With only 11 deaths, the last being on 01 June 2020, the COVID-19 fatality rate in Sri Lanka stands at 0.54%, which is significantly lower than the global fatality rate of 4.85%, while the recovery rate in Sri Lanka stands at 83.59% higher than the global recovery rate of 54.77%.¹

Madam President,

The approach adopted by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in containing the pandemic, which has also been commended by the World Health Organisation, has been inclusive, non-discriminatory and holistic, providing foremost importance to safeguarding the health and safety of not only its people but foreign nationals in its territory.

The steps taken by the Government to curb the spread of the virus did not at any point involve resort to emergency measures that would have required derogations from the

¹ COVID-19: Live Situational Analysis Dashboard of Sri Lanka- Health Promotion Board of Sri Lanka, updated as at 01 July 2020, <https://hpb.health.gov.lk/covid19-dashboard/>

exercise of fundamental freedoms, but were strictly limited to minimum temporary restrictions on movement in the interest of public health, in accordance with the due process of law, with the aim of protecting right across the country all sections of society during this pandemic, which too were fully lifted on 28 June 2020.

These public health measures were accompanied by a series of policies aimed at advancing the economic and social rights of particularly the vulnerable segments in society, such as support for low income families, older persons, the differently-abled, day income earners, farmers and industries, with a view to building their resilience to the effects of the pandemic.

In this regard, we recall the address by the President of Sri Lanka to the Summit of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) on 4 May 2020, where the attention of world leaders was drawn to the unprecedented economic and debt-related challenges arising from COVID-19, and the consequent need for debt relief and financial stimulus for developing countries. We appreciate that the High Commissioner has also highlighted this need in her update by calling for debt relief and direct investments to fulfil the right to development in the post-pandemic world.

At the regional level, Sri Lanka has contributed USD 5 million to the COVID-19 Emergency Fund of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to assist pandemic related challenges in the region.

Madam President,

As the COVID-19 pandemic moves from one geographical region in the world to another, we are increasingly reminded of the stark inequalities that exist in our global landscape, which are often exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic. The United Nations system, including this Council, has a pivotal role in addressing these inequalities and in ensuring that no one is actually left behind in global efforts to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. Sri Lanka believes that genuine dialogue and cooperation among the international community is important to achieve this objective and we stand ready to share its experience and good practices with fellow nations and work in solidarity with them towards this end.

Madam President,

With regard to views expressed on Tuesday (30 June) by the core group on Resolution 30/1 on Sri Lanka (UK, Canada, Germany, North Macedonia and Montenegro), the GoSL has made clear that even as it withdraws from co-sponsorship of Resolution 30/1, it remains committed to achieve reconciliation, accountability and human rights within the framework of the Sri Lankan Constitution, through a domestically designed and executed process in line with the Government's policy framework. We urge all parties once again to recognize the realities on the ground, and appreciate this approach of focusing on deliverable measures of reconciliation - which is backed by a people's mandate and is in the interest of Sri Lanka and its people, instead of opting to continue with a framework driven externally that has failed to deliver genuine reconciliation for over four and half years.

In conclusion, the Government of Sri Lanka continues its engagement with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Human Rights mechanisms and work in close cooperation with the international community through capacity building and technical assistance in mutually agreed areas, in keeping with domestic priorities and policies.

Thank you.