



Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, Geneva

Tel : (+41) 022 919 12 50, Fax : (+41) 022 734 90 84

E-mail: mission@lankamission.org Web: www.lankamission.org

Address by H.E Ravinatha Aryasinha, Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations at the 66th Independence Day celebrations in Geneva - 1 February 2014

Ayubowan, Vannakam, Assalamu Alaikum, Good Evening

Ven. Sirs, Reverend Sirs, Ladies and Gentlemen, and dear Sons and Daughters,

Together with colleagues of the Sri Lanka Mission in Geneva, I warmly welcome you to the 66th Independence Day celebrations. I see members of the Sri Lankan community gathered here today as bringing together the ethnic, religious, cultural, and social diversity symbolic of Sri Lanka. I want to specially greet the children who are here today for their presence

Over the past year, under the leadership of President Mahinda Rajapaksa Sri Lanka has seen unprecedented advancement.

- in terms of development, any of you who have recently been to Sri Lanka would not recognize metropolitan Colombo as well as some of the other metropolitan areas today, from a couple of years ago.

- in the Northern and Eastern provinces, the former theatres of conflict, the development that has taken place is even more spectacular. While the whole country has grown a little over 7%, these areas have grown at 27%. This has not been confined to physical development alone, as some may try to construe. Genuine efforts are being made at reconciliation, to heal the wounds of the past, through finding ways to bring closure for people on all sides of the ethnic and religious divide in Sri Lanka, who have suffered for long over the 30 years of the terrorist conflict. A most significant step in this process no doubt was the holding of the Northern Provincial Council elections in September 2013.

- with respect to the international community, Sri Lanka has had vigorous engagement. This was most recently highlighted in Sri Lanka's hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting, as well as the many high level foreign visits to Sri Lanka, including last August by the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

While no doubt there is more to be done, and for that we must work harder, Sri Lanka's achievements to date is no mean gain. They must be juxtaposed with the fact that a few years ago Sri Lanka was known as the land where a ruthless terrorist organisation waged a bloody conflict against its own compatriots, with loss of lives and property almost every day. But today when you watch the nightly news, it is a

great solace to see that Sri Lanka is nowhere near the headlines. Even more important is that no lives are being lost on account of terrorism. I think we tend to forget this reality despite all of us having lost someone of ours in the conflict which raged for 30 years.

However, the negative perceptions and the negative projection of Sri Lanka by those with vested interests continue unabated. This is a challenge all Sri Lankans will have to confront with resolve for a while more, irrespective of the fields we work in.

An year ago, six months after assuming office, addressing my first Independence day celebrations in Geneva, I called upon you, my fellow countrymen and women, to reflect on as to what more you could do to meet this challenge and to contribute towards the development of Sri Lanka.

One year later, having come to know some of you better, the work you do, and the commitment you have for your country, I feel strengthened in the resolve that these obstacles are not insurmountable and that these can be overcome by working together.

- My colleague the Ambassador to the WTO (who handles trade) and I have been encouraged,

by those among you who have played a catalytic role in persuading friends and associates to visit Sri Lanka and to invest in Sri Lanka.

- There have also been a few, including a gentleman who just walked through this door a little while ago, who have inquired from me how they could work in Sri Lanka and contribute their expertise for the betterment of the motherland.

- When I visit fellow Ambassadors and Heads of International Organizations in Geneva, I am particularly touched by the understanding some of them have of the true ground situation in Sri Lanka from staff of Sri Lankan origin and who have served in Sri Lanka.

- I also deeply appreciate the assistance we receive from time to time from those working within International organizations and other agencies based in Geneva, who leverage the energies of these organizations towards the benefit of Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans. I don't want to mention names of the organizations or individuals, but there have been occasions in the last year where some high level visits both to Colombo and to Geneva have been made much more productive, thanks to the help given by those among you.

I am deeply grateful for this support by all of you and look forward to your continued collaboration with the Sri Lanka Mission in Geneva.

Last year, I also called upon you, to contribute towards moderating the negative narratives propagated about Sri Lanka in your own ways - clarifying genuine concerns and debunking falsehoods.

I am greatly encouraged by what I have seen particularly over the past few months, where across Switzerland, some valiant Sri Lankans, found the time, resources and the energy to make their presence felt, by turning up and challenging the many one-sided events being organized in this country by pro LTTE elements - both of Sri Lankan origin, as well as belonging to NGOs and political groups.

In addition to those living in Geneva, I have had the honour of inviting some of them from far flung places in Switzerland, to this event which is normally Geneva focussed, in order to honour the contribution they have made to their motherland. I thank those present, as well as those who may not have been able to undertake the journey here today, for their commitment and for making sure that Sri Lanka's good name is not tarnished and whenever Sri Lanka is challenged, for standing up to be counted.

My wish is that the actions of those who have made these particular contributions will inspire all of you, because as was stated today, these are challenging times for Sri Lanka, and particularly challenging times need particularly committed and courageous men and women to step up to the plate.

I thank you.