



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

Statement by H.E. Ravinatha Aryasinha, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka at the humanitarian segment of the Substantive Session of ECOSOC, Geneva, 17 July 2013

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, Sri Lanka aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Delegation of Fiji on behalf of the G77 and China.

The Report by the Secretary General on Strengthening of the Coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations is timely given the increase of humanitarian challenges as a result of climate change and conflict situations around the world.

In the ongoing discourse of defining sustainable development goals and at a time the international community is seeking to finance sustainable development in a cohesive manner within the United Nations system, this report will undoubtedly be useful.

The fundamental goal of humanitarian action is to save lives and to alleviate suffering. In this regard, the discourse to establish an international system to address the dire situations and the needs of countries in the aftermath of humanitarian catastrophes is important. It is in this context, that my delegation takes cognizance of the need to not only address the immediate humanitarian needs in the aftermath of a disaster, but also as to how countries could rebuild the lives of affected people by promoting a recovery that is sustainable and development oriented.

Sri Lanka reiterates its support to the humanitarian assistance guiding principles articulated in GA Resolution 46/182, especially on the full adherence to the humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality and independence, while engaging in negotiations for and during humanitarian operations. In coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of concerned states need to be fully respected. We also wish to reiterate the need for de-politicization of humanitarian aid and that non-governmental organizations involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance to affected countries should also be accountable, both financially and in the work that is carried out by them.

There are many UN agencies that deliberate on the negative consequences of man-made disasters such as extreme weather patterns, occurring in many corners of the world due to climate change. Primarily at the UNFCCC, extensive discussions for many years are on adaptation for climate change. This requires policies in terms of funding and adapting to face the dire consequences of rising sea levels and unpredictable weather patterns. Unfortunately, the many years of negotiations are at a standstill as funds for adaptation, especially for developing countries are not forthcoming. The establishment of the Green Climate Fund has given hope to the developing countries as they grapple with development challenges in addition to the humanitarian challenges.

In this light, Mr. Chairman, my delegation looks forward to greater engagement in this dialogue, especially at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2015, where the knowledge and best practices on strengthening humanitarian assistance and promoting humanitarian aid transparency and effectiveness could be shared among all stakeholders. This Summit would assist in creating a synergy between the development partners and those who work on disaster preparedness.

As a country that not only grappled with a separatist terrorist conflict for almost 30 long years, but also dealt with an unprecedented natural disaster in the form of the Asian tsunami and floods and land slides that occur due to unpredictable weather patterns, Sri Lanka has faced its share of humanitarian catastrophes in recent times.

Since the Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 26, 2004, which cost the country over 30,000 human lives and posed an unprecedented challenge to immediately responding to a myriad of humanitarian issues, Sri Lanka has made considerable progress in various aspects of disaster management. Resource and expertise constraints were overcome with the prompt assistance of the UN system and other humanitarian and development aid partners. The experience led to creating a concrete disaster responsive and risk reduction strategy, which we continued to improve. We successfully deployed a comprehensive information system – SAHANA – a Free and Open Source Disaster Management System during the 2004 Tsunami. The systems developed to help manage such disasters deployed by the government's Centre of National Operations (CNO), with suitable adaptation, could be deployed in managing disasters in other countries as well. Further, the Road Map Towards Safer Sri Lanka 2005-2015 developed in 2005 in line with the Hyogo Framework and in consultation with a range of partners has provided us with further guidance in the area of disaster management.

Disaster management requires the cooperation of a range of local and international entities. The National Platform, the National Disaster Management Coordinating Committee in Sri Lanka, which has a membership of over 70

comprising representatives from Government, UN, International and National NGOs, media, private sector and universities, plays a pivotal role in this respect. We have also established a strong international network to support and share our work. The 24/7 operational capacity allows us to evacuate coastal areas within an hour of a tsunami alert, which was not the case on that fateful day 9 years ago.

In May 2010 and in January 2011 UN agencies in Sri Lanka had to step up efforts in cooperation with the Government to help the over two million people affected by the severe floods in the country, while in January, May and June 2013, more than a million people in Sri Lanka were affected by the massive floods and the strong winds in the eastern, northern, western, southern, central and north-central provinces. Houses, roads and farmlands were severely damaged. Relief assistance programs have been launched under the coordination of the Ministry of Disaster Management, the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Economic Development. UN agencies were among the foremost to provide flood relief assistance, while many other bilateral aid partners also contributed tremendously.

This plethora of experiences provided us with an opportunity and a challenge to mainstream disaster risk reduction in planning and development. As rapid development could itself lead to more disasters, we started identifying environment and disaster linkages and initiated a number of environmental assessments to promote the adoption of disaster management development.

Sri Lanka's capacity for caring for civilian populations caught up in humanitarian situations was acknowledged, even during the height of the terrorist conflict in Sri Lanka. Throughout the 30 year long terrorist conflict, despite immense economic and logistical difficulties, the Government of Sri Lanka sent food and medical supplies to the North. All the schools, hospitals and clinics in the formally LTTE dominated areas were funded and staffed by the Government. Towards the final stages of the conflict, such food and medical supplies were monitored by the Committee to Coordinate Humanitarian Affairs (CCHA) which included representatives from the embassies of donor countries and UN Agencies in Colombo. In addition to the various NGOs, and the bilateral aid donors that operated in the LTTE dominated areas, the ICRC also had access to the LTTE's final beachhead until the very end of the conflict.

In the last four years following the end of the terrorist conflict in May 2009, Sri Lanka has made significant strides in rebuilding and reconstructing the lives, livelihoods and property of its people. These included addressing both the immediate needs of approximately 300,000 IDPs liberated from conflict-affected areas which was deemed commendable by international standards and their successful resettlement which ended in September 2012. This also includes the

demining of approximately 95% of land contaminated with landmines within four years of the end of the conflict. Recently, as recommended by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), the GOSL also initiated a program to pay compensation to the conflict-affected residents of Northern Province, who lost loved ones and property and sustained injuries, as part of a process of restitution. The government has allocated Rs. 85 million in 2013 for the purpose.

Those countries that have faced or are continuing to face such challenges will particularly recognize the significance of these developments.

The recent phasing down of the operational role of the UNHCR and ECHO and the re-orientation of the ICRC's activities in Sri Lanka reflect an acknowledgement by the international community of Sri Lanka's success story in responding to humanitarian situations, both manmade and natural.

Let me assure this august assembly that the Government of Sri Lanka continues to stand ready to share our experience as best practices on humanitarian effectiveness, with other countries that are similarly placed, in an effort to relieve those who undergo suffering due to humanitarian emergencies.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, my delegation trusts that the resolution titled "Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations" can be adopted by consensus.

I Thank you Mr. Chairman.