



Statement by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Human Rights Council

Social Forum: Access to medicines in the context of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including best practices in this regard

18 - 20 February 2015

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, Sri Lanka wishes to express its appreciation for convening this meeting today on this important and timely topic of access to medicines in the context of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including best practices in this regard.

Medicines are a fundamental part of the health care delivery, where access to preventive and curative care is inextricably linked with access to medicines. Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also recognises the importance of access to medicine as an integral component of the right to health.

Despite concerted efforts, Sri Lanka notes with concern that a third of the world's population, living mainly in developing countries, still do not have regular access to essential medicine. Limitations in manufacturing capacities in developing countries are a major impediment to access to affordable and quality medicines.

Recognizing that a healthier nation can contribute to its economic, social, mental and spiritual development, Sri Lanka since 1930s has successfully implemented a consistent policy of free health care services including medicines and free hospitalization for all its citizens in a non-discriminatory manner.

This has resulted in an impressive record of health indicators and successful realization of health related MDG targets in Sri Lanka.

The success of health sector in Sri Lanka is mainly due to its effective public delivery system, which provides both preventive and curative care from grassroot level to the national level. Health care system based on Western medicine coexists with an indigenous system of traditional Ayurvedic medicine, which broadened the choice for the consumer. The State Pharmaceutical Cooperation (SPC), with its well established island-wide network of distribution contributes for the quality assured health care products at affordable prices to all districts of Sri Lanka. Recognizing that the essential drug lists for each level of medical institution needs to be continuously reviewed, a national list of essential medicines are maintained by the National Cosmetic Devises and Drug Regulatory Authority.

In furthering our commitments for free and quality health services in equitable manner, the current President, H.E. Maithripala Sirisena, who was the former Minister of Health, has given a significant attention to strengthen the health sector, including increasing budget resources, promoting indigenous medicinal practices, and ensuring affordable access to quality medicines as stipulated in the new Government's 100 day programme.

As one of the landmark achievements in our health care system, the Cabinet of Ministers two weeks ago approved the National Medicinal Drug, Devises and Cosmetic Authority draft bill, which will be presented to the Parliament shortly.

This long awaited policy which has been formulated with intensive consultations with all stakeholders, covering several crucial aspects including:

- (1) the availability of safe, efficacious and good quality medicinal drugs, safe, effective and acceptable quality devices cosmetics to the general public at affordable prices;

- (2) effective quality assurance through the services provided by National Medicinal Drug Quality Assurance Laboratory and other recognized laboratories,
- (3) encourage the manufacturing of medicinal drugs in Sri-Lanka; and
- (4) promote the safe and rational use of medicinal drugs by health care sector and the general public, including prescribing the medicines by their generic names.

Mr. Chairman,

The increasing challenges posed by the emerging health issues around the globe alerts all States and Governments to take robust decisions in strengthening their health care systems, with easy access to quality, affordable medicines as well as with efficient preventive measures.

In Conclusion Mr. Chairman, success story of Sri Lanka clearly highlights persistent commitments at all levels including highest policy level, which could be considered as an effective and successful model for developing countries in terms of the best practices.

Thank you.