



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

Sri Lanka's high enrolment rates in schools contribute to achieving gender parity

Sri Lanka has observed that the high enrolment rates at primary and secondary levels which reflect the impact of longstanding policies supporting access to basic education without discrimination, have contributed towards Sri Lanka's success in achieving gender parity in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Intervening during an Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Education and IE on Human Rights and International Solidarity at the on-going 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council, Ms. Priyanga Wickramasinghe, Counsellor in Geneva, noted that Sri Lanka's education policy and legislation is formulated to reach all children. It identifies vulnerable groups of children such as those with disabilities, affected by conflict, street children and those abused or abandoned and presents examples of innovative strategies and interventions targeted at these groups to eliminate discrimination in Education.

Ms. Wickramasinghe said, the National Child Development Fund is established with the aim of providing financial assistance to children affected by economic and other difficulties to further their educational pursuits. In cases where a child is deprived of schooling for economic reasons, measures would be taken by the Child Rights Promotion Officer to re-school the child and take further follow up measures, including by educating the parents in this regard. She said access to education is guaranteed to ethnic minorities in their national language of choice, be it Sinhala or Tamil, in all parts of the country With regard to the 594 former child combatants who surrendered at the end of the conflict in 2009, the Counsellor said Sri Lanka followed a policy of treating all such children as victims and not as perpetrators and all possible steps were taken to look into their welfare. As of January 2013, they have all been rehabilitated and reintegrated into society and are pursuing their education.

212 youth among the former LTTE combatants who were previously pursuing tertiary education were re-inducted to the university system to follow their undergraduate studies, following rehabilitation.

Intervening during the Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on the issue on discrimination against women in law and practice, later same day, Ms. Wickramasinghe said, Sri Lanka had for over 60 years continued to enjoy the benefits of a universal free education system from primary to tertiary levels which has contributed significantly to their empowerment. Due to increased sensitivity to women's issues and gender-sensitive Government policies, the status of women in Sri Lanka has improved significantly over time as is demonstrated by higher levels of attainment in education and economic empowerment, equal participation in the labour force, as well as increased engagement in decision-making processes.

Intervening during the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking and on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights especially women and children, it was noted that Sri Lanka has enacted legislation to make trafficking a very serious offence under the Penal Code, which embodies a broad definition on human trafficking. Having ratified the UN Convention against the Transnational Organized Crime and signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, the Government enacted the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No 16 of 2006, which introduced legislation in line with these instruments and which applies to multiples offences committed in whole or partly in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is also working in collaboration with the IOM and ILO to provide specialized training for government officials in identifying victims of trafficking and in other preventive measures. The first government shelter for victims of human trafficking in Sri Lanka was opened in December 2012 in collaboration with the IOM. The provision of a shelter for victims of trafficking will ensure that identified victims are provided safe shelter and are also referred for necessary services, including medical, psychological and legal assistance and that the re-victimization of victims is prevented.

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