



UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF SRI LANKA
14th session of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review

Opening Statement by Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe

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**Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations
Geneva**

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is my privilege and pleasure to share with the 14th Session of the UPR Working Group information and perspectives on the action taken to promote and protect human rights in Sri Lanka in the period since our first review in 2008. It has been our consistently articulated position that, in the particular circumstances and context of the Sri Lankan situation, the UPR process provides the best opportunity to raise questions and seek clarifications about the evolving situation in the country.

What we had hoped for earlier this year was time and space for Sri Lanka to complete the work of its domestic process that was in train in the post-conflict phase. In March, we stated that the upcoming UPR would prove to be the ideal platform to discuss all aspects of interest and concern, and today we appear before you to fulfill that pledge. A country's human rights situation cannot be assessed in isolation and should be examined in the context of the realities on the ground. We are ready, prepared and equipped to brief the Working Group and to engage in a cordial and productive dialogue, in a spirit of candour and openness, as to the promotion and protection of human rights in Sri Lanka. We will also engage with the Working Group on our plans and expectations to achieve incremental improvements in the human rights situation in the context of post-conflict peace-building, reconciliation and the achievement of normality for all our people.

We appreciate the level of interest shown in the present developments in Sri Lanka— exemplified by the 99 countries that have subscribed to the list of speakers and the 20 countries that have sent in questions in advance. As much as we are here to put forth our perspectives, we hope that, through this dialogue, a greater understanding of the realities in Sri Lanka will be forged. I appreciate Australia, Cambodia, Canada, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ethiopia, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America, who have indicated their interest by presenting questions that permit a more focused discussion.

In the course of my presentation and those of my fellow delegates, we will respond to these questions. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce my delegation so that those of our peers participating in this interactive dialogue would be assured that the right people are available to authoritatively answer any question. I look forward to receiving the recommendations that countries may propose and assure you that we will give them our serious consideration.

Madam President,

Let me say a word on our former engagement during the first cycle of the Review and the steps we have taken pursuant thereto. In May and June of 2008, I was privileged to lead the Sri Lankan delegation to its initial UPR. We received many recommendations, a majority of which we were able to agree to. We were forthright in informing our interlocutors as to those with which we could not agree. We also made several voluntary pledges in

keeping with our national goals and priorities. That UPR presented Sri Lanka with the opportunity of taking a structured and holistic view of human rights in the country. This was true of the internal and external dimensions of human rights. Internally, we were able to take stock of our strengths and the challenges before us. Externally, we were able to better coordinate and communicate our achievements with our friends and partners.

The chief positive that we can draw from that engagement in 2008 was the formulation of the National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (NHRAP). This was one of our principal pledges, made in keeping with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993. Firmly based on our national plans and priorities, we took into account the recommendations accepted and the pledges made, recommendations of treaty bodies and special procedure mechanisms in devising this plan. We commenced work almost immediately thereafter to draft the Action Plan. Civil society representation was invited and co-opted into the exercise. Finally, senior officials reviewed the Action Plan and I presented it to the Cabinet which granted its approval in September 2011. In December, the implementation strategy was also approved by Cabinet including institutional arrangements for coordination and monitoring. It was an extensive, time consuming process, but one that we are satisfied with. Our civil society partners were fully involved – having near equal representation on the drafting committees. Government focal points were also extensively consulted prior to obtaining final approval. We have been engaged in the initial stages of implementation during the past 10 months and will be able to undertake a review towards the end of the year. It is also important to acknowledge that, although we received some initial material support from

the UN Country Team in Sri Lanka, we ensured that the preparation and implementation of the Action Plan is a nationally driven and nationally owned exercise.

Madam President,

Several delegations have raised questions as to implementation of this National Action Plan which we call the NHRAP. It addresses 08 thematic areas, viz., civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, children's rights, labour rights, migrant worker rights, the prevention of torture, women's rights and the rights of IDPs. I am happy to share specific examples of implementation which we have achieved in the course of this year so that our friends and peers would be able to appreciate our clear commitment towards the promotion and protection of human rights in Sri Lanka.

- We are preparing draft legislation on occupational safety, health and welfare at work and this is being done by the Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations (under Labour Rights);
- Directives have been issued by the Police Department to ensure physical safety of persons taken into custody and the provision of access to legal counsel as of right (under Prevention of Torture),
- the adoption and implementation of a national Trilingual policy as well as the enhancement of scope and reach of national vocational qualification (NVQ) by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (under Economic Social and Cultural Rights),
- accelerated demining and awareness raising among IDPs of risks due to mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) (under Rights of IDPs),

- implementation of the national action plan supporting the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act of 2005 (under Rights of Women),
- strengthening capacity to support Child Helpline (under Rights of Children),
- establishment by the Sri Lanka Police Department of a special unit to combat human smuggling and trafficking (under Rights of Migrant Workers),
- completion of review and improvement of training syllabus and period of training for police officers on human rights and language training, especially Tamil language training (under Civil and Political Rights).
The objective is to ensure that Police officers are conversant with the language when serving in areas in which the majority speak that language.

Madam President,

As you can see we have, in fact, commenced the implementation of the NHRAP and those who raise questions as to the lack of progress may be reassured by these specific examples. We will continue to provide updates to the Council on further progress.

This also outlines the major vehicle availed of to implement the outcome of the 2008 UPR. What must also be borne in mind, is the fact that the 2008 UPR took place at a critical juncture in Sri Lanka's nearly 3 decade-long war against terrorism. Almost a year earlier, the LTTE had been defeated in the Eastern Theatre and measures to ensure a return to civilian life were being implemented. Soon after the Review, the final phase of the

humanitarian operation was launched to rescue the civilians who were being held by the LTTE in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. A sea-change occurred approximately 12 months after the 2008 UPR with the rescue of nearly 300,000 civilians in the month of May 2009. What is of special significance is that our engagement with the community of nations – especially in the Human Rights Council – never lessened in intensity, and we regularly briefed the Council of contemporary developments in Sri Lanka during the most difficult of times during the humanitarian operation.

Madam President,

Sri Lanka, like any post-conflict polity, faced challenges of a magnitude and scope that were truly daunting. The housing and maintenance of hundreds of thousands of civilians, restoring security, law and order, clearing of vast tracts of land contaminated by UXO including IEDs and landmines, restoring physical, administrative, economic and social infrastructure, preparing people for resettlement, identifying ex-combatants for rehabilitative care, the transition from humanitarian assistance to a development phase, all while maintaining a stable economy and sustainable growth in the rest of the country, were just some of the tasks that the Government had to contend with. At the same time, we were not complacent but tried our utmost to prevent and forestall acts of destabilization from within and outside the country. There are still some elements that support the LTTE's cause of dismemberment and separation of our island nation. We are aware of these initiatives and will defeat them by our ongoing strategy of re-democratization, reconciliation, reconstruction and development.

Madam President,

Conflict touches the lives of everyone. When armed conflict continues for as long as 30 years – as it did in Sri Lanka – it affects generations of people. It is for this reason that the Government has placed such primacy on non-repetition of the mistakes of the past and on genuine reconciliation. No one who lived through the conflict would want their children or their children's children to experience what Sri Lanka collectively experienced in the past 30 or so years. We are aware that reconciliation is not an easy exercise, nor is it one that can be achieved overnight.

Some of our friends by way of questions posed have indicated a desire to see a more comprehensive approach taken with regard to the allegedly disappeared. The UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance (WGEID) has long engaged with successive Governments to clear a longstanding backlog of 5,679 cases. I must note that many of these cases (over 4,000) date back over 20 years to the pre-1990 period. A further 1,089 date back to the 1991 to 2005 period. The remaining number lays to rest the canard of an increasing trend in disappearance in the recent past.

We are working to establish a cross agency national mechanism to clear this backlog. A working committee has been established to respond to cases of disappearances and a Deputy Inspector General of Police appointed to conduct ground verifications of such cases to ascertain the present status. A special piece of legislation to enable the issuance of death certificates to next of kin was put in place and next of kin can claim monies due to them and obtain secure a substantial degree of closure.

As a part of implementing our responsibilities, the Government submitted its response on 59 cases of disappearances recently brought to its attention by the Working Group. Another set of 100 cases referred by the Working Group has been verified and submitted. Initial investigations have revealed that nearly 50% of the cases have not been complained of to law enforcement. Further investigations are being conducted on the remaining allegations communicated by the Group. I must note that a comprehensive addressing of this challenge would be greatly facilitated if countries that have received thousands of asylum seekers would cooperate with us by giving us the names of such persons of Sri Lankan origin so that a proper comparison with the allegedly missing can be done.

One of the questions we received has pointed out that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has recorded 230 cases of disappearances in 2011. However, if recourse is had to the National Report of Sri Lanka, detailed information as to complaints of allegedly “missing persons” and “persons abducted” in 2010 and 2011 may be accessed. This information is presented together with the remarkable success rate of the Sri Lankan authorities who have resolved a great many of these supposed disappearances. The total number of persons reported allegedly missing in 2010 was 7,940 out of which 6,653 have been found. The corresponding numbers for 2011 are 7,296 reported and 5,185 traced. In 2010, the number of persons allegedly “abducted” was 225 of whom 207 were later traced. The number of allegedly abducted in 2011 was 239 of whom 226 have been traced. Outstanding allegations must and will be thoroughly investigated and any offenders brought to book.

Madam President,

On another question received, in Sri Lanka, the freedoms of association, thought, conscience and expression receive constitutional recognition. Our civil society has a long history of persons who have advocated for the rights of victims, the disadvantaged and the marginalized. Persons can canvass for the protection of these rights before courts of law. Civil society activists at all levels, have freedom to jointly or in association with others form non-governmental organizations and community based organizations. Organizations established as trusts, voluntary social service organizations or as private companies. They may seek registration at the national level if they require further facilitation by the Government. This registration is not mandatory. The allegations of intolerance or attacks against these organizations or their leadership - in verbal or other form - emanate from time to time. I must state with the utmost firmness that these alleged attacks are no part of Government policy to stifle criticism, activism or dissent. Neither does the Government condone any such attacks. As far as civil society activists who wish to engage with the Government is concerned, in general, they are a valued partner in the implementation of the NHRAP and we will work closely with them.

Madam President,

Several countries have also sought clarifications as to the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and the implementation of its action plan published in July this year, pursuant to a decision by the Cabinet of Ministers. The President, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, appointed the LLRC in May 2010 in order to strengthen the national

reconciliation process and to ensure the dividends of peace to all Sri Lankans. The Cabinet of Ministers in May 2012 decided that a Task Force headed by the Secretary to the President would monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the LLRC. In July, a matrix containing the National Plan of Action to implement the LLRC recommendations developed by the Task Force and presented to Cabinet was approved setting out the main focus areas for implementation.

Madam President,

You may recall that the primary focus of the ill-conceived March 2012 Resolution in this Council was the implementation of the LLRC Report. Long before the adoption of the Resolution, we assured the Council that we are committed to the implementation of the domestic process by way of an action plan and that we should be given time and space to achieve this objective. We have fulfilled our commitment with a clear time frame for implementation which is in process as we speak.

The main focus areas are IHL Issues, Human Rights, Land Return and Resettlement, Restitution/ Compensatory Relief and Reconciliation. The Task Force has identified a corresponding activity, an implementing agency, a key performance indicator and a time frame in respect of each recommendation. I must reiterate that the action plan and its implementation is being spearheaded by the most senior officials of the Government. Ministries and agencies have been requested to forward their budgetary requirements to aid in the implementation of the actions within their purview, commencing with the national budgetary process for 2013.

Several thematic sub-committees functioning under an apex task force is envisaged for better coordination and implementation. Some countries have expressed concerns that only some proposals have been included for implementation. It must be pointed out that 285 was the sum total of observations and recommendations of the LLRC. There was some duplication in Chapter 9 of the LLRC report. Moreover, some of the recommendations fall under the ambit and scope of the NHRAP. The Action Plan is based on what is implementable in the short, medium and long terms, and the overall recommendations are further sub-divided on a thematic basis into policy and practical matters. The 4 main sub divisions relate to-

- National Policy;
- the final phase of the conflict;
- recommendations related to Human Rights and National Security concerns; and
- recommendations related to re-settlement and development

Certain matters of broad national policy in the Action Plan are to be referred to the proposed Parliamentary Select Committee.

Madam President,

Several questions received by us on the LLRC Action Plan asked for specific examples of completion or substantial progress on activities . Like the NHRAP we are happy to share with our friends actual implementation since its approval by Cabinet in July 2012. The implemented areas so far are as follows:

- Devising a centralized database of missing persons;
- Implementing the Registration of Deaths Act (2010);
- Creating a centralized database of detainees and make access available to next of kin;
- Screening detainees to identify those with special needs;
- Examination of cases of young ex-combatants, release and reunification with families;
- Establish a task force to develop and implement a child tracing programme;
- Ensure freedom of movement for media including in the North and East;
- Remove restrictions on visiting places of worship;
- Allow visitors from overseas to visit recently resettled areas; and
- Free movement of persons on Kandy-Jaffna A9 Highway.

Hence the suggestions that only part of the recommendations are addressed, and the critique that there is no progress in implementation, is without basis. We will of course as in the case of the NHRAP continue to update the Council on further progress made.

Madam President,

Further progress has been made in relation to the recommendation made on the treatment of ex-combatants. As of 22 October 2012, 11,012 persons, which included 594 LTTE child soldiers, have been rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. Of the approximately 12,000 persons identified as ex-combatants and provided rehabilitation, as of 22 October 2012, only 782 beneficiaries are undergoing rehabilitation, and 262 are

under judicially mandated custody (remand). Action is underway to expedite the legal proceedings. If this is not clear progress, I fail to understand what is.

Another important recommendation of the LLRC that we have done our utmost to implement is the rapid and sustainable resettlement. Sustainability is of prime importance in this context and resettled persons must be provided with “durable solutions” which means that people who return must be able to lead normal productive lives, equal or better to the life they led pre-displacement. The closure of the last IDP welfare centre in Menik Farm by 24 September resulted in our having to deal with only those IDPs who reside with host families and those in protracted situations of displacement. While our focus has been on the nearly 300,000 IDPs we received after their rescue in 2009, we have also paid due attention to the “older caseload”. As at the beginning of October our record of total resettlement was 501,194 persons. Among the remaining caseload are the Muslim residents of the North who were forcibly evicted by the LTTE in 1990/1991 numbering in the tens of thousands in pursuance of their policy of ethnic cleansing. Thousands of Sinhalese were similarly evicted by the LTTE. We are clarifying the remaining number of displaced of every category and will put in place programmes of resettlement for all those who wish to return. To aid in the process of resettlement the total number of houses constructed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces up to September 2012, one hundred and twenty four thousand one hundred and eighty four (124, 184) at a cost of Rs. Billion 33.34 from 2005. Needless to say we are justifiably proud of our achievement. This is another example of implementation of a recommendation of the domestic process.

Madam President,

Sri Lanka's rapid progress in resettlement would not have been possible without the intensive humanitarian demining operation. It is a matter of pride that a vast majority of the work has been completed, at considerable risk by the Sri Lanka Army. Initially, it was suspected that mines had been laid in an area of more than 5,000 square kilometres. Demining such a vast area was a formidable challenge that the Government unhesitatingly undertook immediately after the conflict ended. At present, 2,061 sq.km have been identified as hazardous areas. The area cleared is over 1,953 sq. km. The scale of the problem the Government faced in demining can be clearly seen from the number of mines and other devices unearthed and neutralised during the demining process. Over 900,000 hazardous devices have been recovered. These include anti-tank, anti-personnel and IEDs amongst the recovered UXO. As of 25 October 2012, about 98% of the areas identified for demining have been cleared and approximately 108 square kilometers of territory remains to be cleared. This data refers to 10 Districts in all including 3 in the East, 5 in the North and 2 in the North Central Province. Further demining will enable the remaining contaminated areas to be used for resettlement.

The Sri Lanka Army was responsible for demining approximately 75% of the land which was the largest single area assigned to any of the parties involved in demining and included most of the densely mined regions. The entire demining programme was carefully planned and executed. Priority areas were chosen to maximize efficiency and enable the speedy return of the displaced. The first was to demine towns and villages; the second, to

demine agricultural areas and paddy fields; and finally to clear forested areas. Presently, nearly all of the two main priority areas have been dealt with. Work only continues in a few areas where the concentration of mines is at its highest. Many of these are places where heavy fighting took place during the last stages of the conflict. It is our aim to completely clear these in the near future. I ask the question once again: isn't this progress?

Madam President,

As we pointed out in our National Report, special emphasis has been given to regulating the activities regarding the management of land in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The Ministry of Land and Land Development has decided to resolve the land disputes in these areas by implementing a special programme. Cabinet approval has been received for policy proposals relating to the matter. It is proposed to set in place mediation boards in terms of the Mediation (Special Categories of Disputes) Act to resolve disputes between owners who have paper title and have been displaced and those of them who are in unlawful occupation as an alternate dispute resolution mechanism. Furthermore, an amendment to the Prescription Ordinance is presently being considered whereby displaced or disadvantaged owners of land will be exempted from the rules of prescription during a period of 30 years so as to enable them to defeat any competing claims based on the lapse of time.

Madam President,

With regard to matters of accountability and the allegations as to the violations of humanitarian and human rights law, the LLRC in its report clearly states, that protection of civilian life was a key factor in the formulation of Government policy for carrying out military operations, and the deliberate targeting of civilians formed no part of that strategy.

We have pointed out in our national report that the Government has already carried out a series of measures which will enable firm and verifiable conclusions to be arrived at on issues involving accountability, without any element of conjecture or speculation. If reliable evidence is available in respect of any contravention of the law, the domestic legal process will be set in motion. I must stress that these are Sri Lankans and our Government is determined to make a full accounting for our people. As no comprehensive census has been carried out in the Northern Province since 1981, the Department of Census and Statistics was charged with the task of making an enumeration of vital events in the Northern Province and this task was completed in 2011. Critical for socio-economic and development planning, the enumeration, followed by an island wide census in 2012, will provide an accurate picture of patterns of deaths, outward migration within and outside the country, caused by the conflict and other reasons. A comparison of the population data from the enumeration and from the island wide census will enable the Government to gain an understanding of the magnitude and ramifications of the conflict. Causes could include LTTE cadre killed in action, cadre and civilians who escaped the conflict and migrated to other parts of the country and/or overseas, civilians likely to have been killed in the crossfire, civilians killed by the LTTE while seeking to escape from their control, false reporting and

reported deaths that did not occur during the period of the humanitarian operation. The outcome will finally and conclusively lay to rest the unfounded allegations of 'tens of thousands' of civilian deaths alleged to have occurred in the first five months of 2009. I am sure that you will agree, that this is indicative of a serious and systematic attempt to account for people.

Madam President,

Still on the subject of accountability and responding to questions received, a five-member Court of Inquiry was appointed on 2 January 2012 by virtue of the powers vested in the Army Commander under the Courts of Inquiry Regulations, read with the Army Disciplinary Regulations, promulgated by the Army Act and is headed by a Major General. This Court of Inquiry was tasked with inquiring into the observations made by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in its report on alleged civilian casualties during the final phase of the Humanitarian Operation and probe as regards Channel-4 video footage.

Since its initial sitting in the first week of January 2012, as of October 2012, the Court of Inquiry has convened approximately 30 times and has examined many witnesses. It should be noted that the Court is investigating more than 50 incidents referred to in the LLRC report. Investigations cover whether or not any attacks were carried out by the Army on civilians, on hospitals or in the no-fire zones including the specific instances referred to in the LLRC Report. Irrespective of whether the Channel 4 story is

authentic or not, the Court of Inquiry has been mandated to take measures to ascertain whether the uniformed persons featured in the Channel 4 footage can be identified as members of the Sri Lanka Army, and other violations of military law, if any.

Additionally, the Sri Lanka Army has commenced investigations by appointing a Board of Inquiry to study the LLRC recommendations and formulate a viable action plan to implement the recommendations that are relevant to the Army. The Sri Lanka Navy has also initiated similar measures.

Madam President,

Questions were also raised on the subject of Torture. With regard to allegations of torture, there are several avenues for investigation and prosecution of offenders. Prosecution under the Convention Against Torture Act, complaints to the National Police Commission, complaints to the Human Rights Commission and even a complaint to the Apex Court alleging torture, are avenues available to a victim of torture or other ill treatment violative of human rights. The Police also conducts internal reviews and may take action against a delinquent officer by utilizing disciplinary processes. Workshops on Prevention of Torture for police officers have been conducted and 474 have been trained from 2009 – 2012. A new initiative with the assistance of the Asia Foundation has been launched to expand training and education of police officers and investigators. It is envisaged that prosecutors, judicial officers, and prison

officers will be included. New measures taken by the Police will also assist in reducing the incidence of abuse and ill treatment of persons. A circular issued in December 2011 by the Inspector-General of Police ensures the safety of the persons in police custody – both male and female. Moreover, by circular issued in May 2012, access to Attorneys by persons in Police custody is assured as of right. At the same time, the upgrading of interrogation and forensic investigation skills is ongoing to ensure that officers do not have to rely on coercive methods to obtain information.

A question was also received by us on the status of the Bill on the protection of victims and witnesses. The draft legislation of 2008 has been amended to incorporate recommendations made by the Supreme Court and the Parliamentary Consultative Committee on Justice and has now been submitted to Cabinet and, upon approval, will be presented to Parliament for enactment.

Madam President,

Sri Lanka has consistently engaged with the OHCHR, the Special Procedure Mechanisms and relevant Treaty Bodies. In the context of the invitation extended in April 2011 to the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit the country, a preparatory visit by a team from the OHCHR was facilitated by the Government in September 2012. The team was granted unfettered access and was provided with the opportunity of interacting with a broad range of stakeholders, including senior representation from government, opposition and civil society. We are still awaiting the dates from the High Commissioner on her impending visit to Sri Lanka.

Madam President,

One concern that seems to have drawn the attention of our friends is the question of military presence in the former theatre of conflict. Here, I must categorically state that there has been a significant reduction of the military strength in the North since the end of the conflict. There is no intrusive military presence impacting on civilian life –in Jaffna or in the Wanni. On the contrary, the military has successfully completed a great deal of work to assist civilians return to their normal lives in the aftermath of the conflict. From May 2009 to October 2012, the Army has constructed 4,652 permanent new houses, 6,171 semi-permanent houses and has renovated 7,454 houses, through their initiative and efforts. It has constructed 73 schools, renovated nearly 500 old school buildings and has constructed 23 school playgrounds. The Army has made a significant contribution to the improvement of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. The Army has contributed to the socio-cultural needs of the people by building/restoring nearly 250 places of religious worship belonging to all faiths in the North and the East. Moreover, it has contributed to the repair of 11 main roads and 43 minor roads during this period.

Livelihood assistance has also been facilitated by the Army. A number of medical clinics have been held, and assistance provided for the conduct of religious, cultural and other festivals. The Sri Lanka Navy and Air Force also facilitated similar projects. The military has, therefore, delivered an outstanding contribution to the restoration of normality. It is noteworthy that these functions have now been taken over by a fully restored civilian administration.

Madam President,

A question was also posed as to a supposed increase in sexual violence in these areas. Sri Lanka set up special Women's Protection Units with female Police officers and Women's Centres in the IDP welfare centres and are continuing to provide counselling services. Strict legal action has been taken to combat sexual violence. During the three-year span from May 2009 to May 2012, 256 sexual offences have been reported in the North in all five districts; 176 cases are pending hearing by the courts, 67 cases have been forwarded to the Attorney General for advice, 2 convictions have been recorded and 11 cases are currently under investigation. Any correlation between military presence and sexual violence is unfounded.

The protection of women and the advancement of their rights has been a cornerstone of our Government's policy. Especially in the post-conflict phase, the problems of women have been under scrutiny. Several projects have been initiated in this connection including livelihood development, micro-finance, self-employment, entrepreneurship, empowerment, enhancing access to law enforcement and legal remedies. There has been a special emphasis on conflict-affected women including female-headed households.

Sri Lanka has, over the past several decades, meaningfully integrated women as equal partners in shaping the economic, political and social life of the country. We recognize that civil and political rights are interlinked with social, cultural and economic rights and that these reinforce each

other. Sri Lanka ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and acceded to the Optional Protocol in 2002. Sri Lanka's combined fifth to seventh periodic report was considered at the forty-eight session of the Committee and observations on concluding observations have been submitted.

Language policy has been one of the key issues which impacts upon the reconciliation process. We have set out the measures taken in relation to both the NHRAP and the LLRC Action Plan relating to the Trilingual Policy (2012 to 2020), and its implementation. It is heartening that the military and the police have taken a lead in accelerated language training. Future recruitment and advancement in the public service will also depend on achievement of linguistic competence. Language is key to confidence building among the multi-lingual segments of Sri Lankan society.

Madam President,

With the restoration of local governance structures, local civil administration, participation in national elections and a restoration of civic consciousness, the next step would be consideration of elected Provincial representation. Demining, resettlement and the establishment of settled communities are pre-requisites for democratic activity – especially at the peripheral and regional level.

There is also the question of the larger discussion of the way ahead as a nation and the institutional and other arrangements necessary to unify the people and work together for a mutually beneficial future. We also wish to reemphasize that a central feature of the Government's approach to

evolving a consensus formula remains, primarily, the establishment of a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC), aimed at achieving multi-party consensus in respect of political and constitutional measures. The motion was unanimously adopted by Parliament in November 2011. Government has already nominated its members to the PSC and is awaiting the nomination of members representing the opposition, after which its sittings can commence. Parallel with this multi-party mechanism, the Government engaged in bilateral discussions with Tamil political parties as well as Muslim representation. Mindful of the fact that all previous attempts at evolving a constitutional formula failed due to the lack of consensus, the Government remains optimistic that the PSC would help achieve the required consensus, given its inclusivity, transparency, and adherence to democratic norms.

Madam President,

The Government of Sri Lanka has expended an enormous amount of resources, time and effort in restoring normality to the conflict affected areas. The Government committed USD 2.8 billion mostly through loans, with some grant funding, in support of ongoing projects in 2011. Investment in infrastructure especially roads, railways, transport will pave the way for restoration of livelihoods and the movement of goods. This is in addition to expenditure on humanitarian assistance and relief where the Government's commitment for 2009 and 2010 alone was USD 368 million. The UN system and international and national NGOs mobilized USD 437.90 and 100.26, respectively, for the period 2009 to mid 2012.

Health is another focus area with the per capita expenditure being over 3.5 times that of other Provinces in the 2009 to 2011 period. The number of hospital beds in the Northern Province per 1 million population is the highest in the country. Nutrition levels of infants and young children and post-partum care availability in Northern areas are also receiving attention, with Jaffna already exceeding the national averages.

Expenditure on education was Rs 1.3 billion for the 2009 to 2011 period and Nine hundred and sixty four schools are functioning in the Northern Province as at August 2012. Free uniforms, books and mid-day meals are provided by the Ministry of Education.

Water and sanitation is an area of focus with an investment of nearly Rs. 30 billion. Supply of electricity to Kilinochchi, Mannar and Mullaitivu needs to be improved to reach the levels of Vavuniya and Jaffna in terms of reach. Rs. 13 billion has been invested by Government supplemented by borrowings in this regard.

Religious sites and places of worship have also been supported and their restoration has also seen costs incurred in respect of all 4 religious faiths practiced in Sri Lanka.

Agriculture has received a boost with paddy (unhusked rice) production in the Northern Province tripling from 2009 to 2011. This momentum will be maintained with the reclaiming of abandoned agricultural land. The provision of farm machinery, tractors, fertilizer, as well as the

disproportionately large Government expenditure on the sector, will bear dividends. The investment in Irrigation for the 3 years since 2009 is approximately Rs. 4.5 billion.

Madam President,

Restrictions on fishing have now been almost completely eased and northern contribution to national fisheries output has almost doubled from 2009 to 2011. Over 48,000 persons are employed in this sector. Infrastructure including boats, ice plants, cool rooms and freezer trucks have increased quantitatively during the post-conflict phase. Animal husbandry and livestock sectors have recorded impressive growth. The banking sector has also expanded to meet the growing need and seen an increase in outlets, deposits, and in special credit schemes to promote livelihood and development. The economy has shown incredible resilience and has demonstrated a growth rate of 22% in 2010 with 27% in 2011 reflecting a high level of return on investment.

Following on a nominal growth rate of 22 per cent in 2010, the Northern province in 2011 recorded the highest growth rate in nominal terms, of 27.1 per cent, among all provinces, and continued to increase its share of the national economy driven by an expansion in agriculture, fishing, construction, transportation and financial services.

Madam President,

We have integrated the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) into the National Development Agenda. Sri Lanka is on track to reach most of the

indicators. Some have been achieved already. Among the notable achievements are those relating to equitable primary education. The universal primary education net enrolment rate has reached 99 per cent in 2009 for both males and females. The proportion of students starting Grade 1 and reaching Grade 5 has increased to almost 100 per cent in 2006/07), child mortality (the current level is 9.7 infant deaths per 1,000 live births) and maternal mortality (the MMR is 39.3 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2009, are the lowest in South Asia), access to safe drinking water (nearly 85 per cent of households have sustainable access to improved drinking water in 2006/07) and literacy (with female adult literacy at 97% and male adult literacy at 98% in 2010). There is no gender disparity in these achievements. In secondary and tertiary education, the ratio of girls enrolled is greater.

Economic development must now seamlessly follow the humanitarian assistance and early recovery phases. The new UN Development Assistance Framework that will be applicable from 2013 reflects this shift in perspective and approach. We expect that, in keeping with our needs and priorities, that our friends and partners will extend their understanding and cooperation to our efforts in developing a stable and prosperous Sri Lanka.

Madam President, I look forward to a very constructive review and thank you for your attention.