



Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, Geneva

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Address by H.E. Ravinatha Aryasinha, Ambassador and Permanent Representative - 69th Independence Anniversary of Sri Lanka Organized by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka in Geneva, 4th February 2017.

On behalf of the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka in Geneva, together with Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to WTO, Ambassador Kumararatne, Deputy Permanent Representative Samantha Jayasuriya and my colleagues, it is with pleasure that I welcome all of you as we join together on this special occasion to celebrate the 69th anniversary of Independence Day of Sri Lanka.

As a nation state, since gaining independence in 1948 on a day like today we have traversed through uncharted waters for nearly seven decades. We have had successes that many others aspired to, particular as a country in the developing world, with un paralleled human development indicators in the spheres of education, health, and social protection policies. At the same time, as you all know, Sri Lanka has spent more than half this period engulfed in conflict, first through two insurrections in the South and since the early 1980s fighting against terrorism that affected almost every citizen of the country and putting the entire socio-economic and political fabric of the country into a huge mayhem and unpredictability.

Today a year short of our 70th Anniversary of regaining our independence, it is important that we pay tribute to all those who fought in gaining independence, and also to all those who laid their lives in preserving that independence throughout out our more recent history. Owing to their sacrifice, we are fortunate to have been able to turn that page, and to be able to boast of a degree of physical national security, that few nations can claim today.

But as President **Maithripala Sirisena** addressing the nation this said this morning, and I quote,

“Today we talk about freedom in a more complex manner than it was discussed in the past. All of us know, at present when we talk about freedom primarily, we talk about a freedom blowing across the sky, including our human freedom, media freedom, the right to expression, right to thought and the right to assemble.

In the process of building our great Motherland as a modern state which is compatible with the twenty-first century, we have to work, giving priority

to the political stability and the social development. All of you know that to achieve those goals, it is necessary to strengthen the national as well as religious reconciliation in the country. Specifically, I have to mention that we, as a Government, have given priority in this regard” (End of quote)

As a symbol of the Government’s commitment to promoting reconciliation, this year, Sri Lanka for the first time observed the National Integration and Reconciliation Week from 8th to 14th January, coinciding with the 2nd Anniversary of the Inauguration-in-Office of President Maithripala Sirisena, where all public officials took a pledge to work with honesty and integrity, and to uphold the best interests of the State. The National Unity Government under the leadership of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, while addressing issues concerning peace and reconciliation, is in parallel engaged with eradicating poverty and advancing sustainable economic and social development of the country, enabling all segments of the society to enjoy the dividends of peace.

As the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, we are mindful of our unique position and responsibility in advancing and contributing to these efforts of the Government and in our capacity as the Consulate General to Switzerland, we are also committed to providing the Sri Lankan citizens and those of Sri Lankan origin every opportunity to remain engaged with Sri Lanka.

Over the past year alone there have been many tangible results in a number of areas and Sri Lanka has also contributed towards expanding the international discourse relating to some of these issues;

- On **human rights**, many in the Human Rights Council has acknowledged the progressive moves by the unity Government in promoting human rights. Besides remaining closely engaged with all stakeholders on the Sri Lanka centered issues relating to reconciliation and accountability before the Human Rights Council, the past year has seen the Mission facilitating a number of country visits of several Special procedures mandate holders to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has participated in country reviews related to 3 core human rights Treaty bodies – namely on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Rights of the Migrant Workers and welfare of their families (CMW) and on prevention of Torture (CAT). The Mission is in the process of preparing for another review in this month on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera will be in Geneva later this month to update the HRC on developments in Sri Lanka and in November, Sri Lanka will also be participating in the 3rd Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
- In the area of **Disarmament and Security Policy**, the Mission has continued to engage closely in the deliberations of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) during its 2016 session. As the outgoing Chair of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Sri Lanka was instrumental in introducing language that enabled to enhance the

mandate on a Lethal Autonomous Weapons System (LAWS) Also last November, for the first time, Sri Lanka was admitted to the Governing Body of the Geneva Center for Security Policy(GCSP). This was an important milestone in Sri Lanka's relations with the GCSP, and Sri Lanka's membership opens up further training opportunities for Sri Lankans and I'm pleased to recognize Col. Ranjan Wijedasa who is with us here today, taking advantage of this opportunity and is currently following a Masters Course in International Security at the GCSP. The enhanced relationship has also created opportunity for Sri Lanka to become a regional center for the GCSP to conduct its regional programmes, and to benefit from Sri Lanka's expertise in the field.

- The Mission also continues to advance Sri Lanka's **multilateral trading interests through the WTO, the UNCTAD and the ITC**. In November 2016, under the leadership of Ambassador Kumararatne the Mission facilitated the participation of the Sri Lankan delegation led by the Minister of Industry and Commerce, and Senior officials at the fourth Trade Policy Review in the WTO, Geneva. Last year Sri Lanka also chaired the Group of Asia-Pacific Developing countries in the WTO, and is working on a programme on Trade Facilitation in Sri Lanka with the assistance from the trade related agencies to bring trade costs down and to improve competitiveness.
- On **Intellectual Property**, collaboration with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in implementing the 10 Point Action Plan we embarked upon in 2014, in addition to seeking to enhance the capacity of the National Intellectual Property Office (NIPO), an 'Intellectual Property Hub' (IP Hub) established in Sri Lanka has brought together a group of stakeholders from the public and private sectors to accelerate innovation and raise awareness on IP. Sri Lanka was selected as one of the four pilot countries in a WIPO project titled 'Intellectual Property, Tourism and Culture', which will contribute to promoting awareness of the role of IP in tourism. WIPO also provided technical assistance for the development of a National Innovation index for Sri Lanka in June 2016.

In October 2016, Sri Lanka also became the 24th country to accede to the Marrakesh Treaty which will facilitate access to published work for persons who are blind, visually impaired or print disabled. In April this year WIPO will organize a national workshop on Traditional Knowledge in Colombo which will contribute to finalizing a draft policy on Traditional Knowledge (TK), Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCE) and Genetic Resources (GR), a long felt need in Sri Lanka's legal discourse.

- On **Migration related issues**, conscious of the over 1.7 million Sri Lankan migrant workers abroad who have been the backbone of the country's economy, we nevertheless have been in the forefront in

shaping up the international discussions and policies that affect their protection, rights and welfare in destination countries, by closely engaging with the IOM and the ILO. We have also leveraged our leadership as the Chair of the Colombo Process we have supported the Ministry of Foreign Employment in working with other labour sending countries in the Asian region on areas such as improving the recruitment practices, pre departure training and orientation, improving and recognizing the skills, as well as enhancing ways for safe and cheaper ways for transfer of remittances Last month Sri Lanka also took over the Chair of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, a voluntary group of 18 Asia-GCC migrant labour sending and receiving countries, where we will collectively find solutions to the common issues, including by actively engaging in the ongoing processes of the UN, including on the 'Global Migration Compact'.

- As a result of our **enhanced engagement with CERN**, while last year for the first time two Sri Lankan undergraduate students participated in CERN's 2016 Summer Students Programme. Next week, (on 8 February) Minister of Science, Technology and Research Susil Premajayantha will be visiting Geneva to sign an International Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between Sri Lanka and CERN, which will facilitate greater cooperation on a long-term basis, which will provide opportunities for participation by scientists, engineers and technicians from Sri Lanka in research projects of CERN, in addition to participation in CERN's scientific and training programmes.
- In the **Health sector**, last year, the Mission engaged with the WHO at the 69th World Health Assembly, making use of the opportunity to project Sri Lanka's achievements in the area of health, and also co - hosted a side -event with WHO and several other Members States on Prevention and Control of Non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In recognition of Sri Lanka's leadership in control of the tobacco President Sirisena was invited as the key note speaker to the 7th Conference of Parties (CoP) of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) held in New Delhi last November. The Mission is working closely with the Sri Lankan authorities, and the IOM and WHO, in preparing for the forthcoming 2nd Global Consultation on Migrant Health in Colombo later this month, which will see the adoption of the 'Colombo Statement on Migrant Health'.
- Given our interest in the **humanitarian agenda**, we will continue our engagement with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the ICRC, the IFRC. Noting the important priorities placed by Sri Lanka in **Environment** climate change, disaster risk reduction, we have been maintaining close engagement with the relevant agencies in Geneva.
- As in 2016, the Mission coordinated the participation of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at the **World Economic Forum (WEF)** Annual

meeting from 17-20 January 2017 in Davos where the delegation had productive engagements with political leaders, CEOs and Heads of World renowned blue chip companies, as well as with the WEF itself in evolving global linkages that will help bolster the rapid economic programmes and draw greater investment to the country.

- The Mission also coordinated the participation and the programme of the Sri Lanka Parliamentary delegation to the 135th Assembly of the **IPU** held from 23 – 27 October 2016 in Geneva, led by Speaker Karu Jayasuriya.
- **As the current Chair of the G-15**, a Group of developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America with its secretariat in Geneva, Sri Lanka has been instrumental in developing partnerships with Geneva based international organisations to further enhance South-South cooperation and technical assistance programmes for the mutual benefit of all member countries. This has resulted in greater cooperation with many international organisations including WIPO, IOM, ITU, CERN, South Centre, UNITAR, WHO etc., among others. Sri Lanka also continues to offer leadership to a Group of the Global South and positively influence policies, especially in the implementation phase of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- We also have benefitted through our cordial relations with the UNITAR, the GCSP, WTO, CERN to get **training and capacity building opportunities** for the Sri Lankan professionals in diplomacy, security policies, trade facilitation etc.
- In my capacity as the **Consul General of Sri Lanka to Switzerland**, this Mission gives prominence to its mandate to provide consular assistance to Sri Lankans living in Switzerland and has been successful in extending consular support to about 1500 persons last year.

Additionally, in supporting our Ambassador in Berlin who is concurrently accredited to Switzerland, our Mission has been able to also contribute towards the Swiss-Sri Lanka relationship, which has seen an intensification in the economic, social, political, cultural and particularly development assistance, through the Swiss Development Cooperation.

These are not mere lofty pronouncements of intent, but actual tangibles which would make a difference to individual Sri Lankans and through them to the country.

While members of my staff derive considerable satisfaction in striving to make a difference, we are conscious that some among you – employed in Missions in Geneva, the Swiss Government, International Organizations, INGOs and as

social workers - who have also been very much part of the confluence of energies that have made some of these achievements possible.

As I have also mentioned previously, I regard all of you as 'goodwill Ambassadors of Sri Lanka'. As we look forward to building a peaceful and prosperous country for all Sri Lankans to live together while cherishing our diversity and to secure a better future for our children, we look forward to your advice, support and contribution in this effort.

As we progress on the path of reconciliation and economic development of the country, the as the overseas Sri Lankan community you have a specific role to play. As citizens benefitted from the free education, health and other provisions, the country calls you to join ranks, to give your individual expertise and the collective strength, that you could leverage in the process and we look forward to your continued contribution. As we work for a better future for Sri Lanka, it is important that we set aside differences, unite our strengths and celebrate our diversity. As Sri Lankans, let us all come together as sisters and brothers to build a peaceful, strong and prosperous country for ourselves and our children.

As the Mission, we will also continue our engagement and work closely with the Sri Lankan community, individually and through the community organizations.

In conclusion, I express my deep appreciation to all of you for taking time to be with us today to celebrate the 69th Independence Day of our country. Please enjoy the evening.

Thank You