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**Intervention by Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha,
Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva at the screening of
“No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka”- 1 March 2013**

The Government of Sri Lanka strongly protests against the efforts by the organizers of this event – Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Festival du Film et Forum International sur les Droits Humains (FIFDH), to use the UN premises for the screening of this film “No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka”. Sri Lanka also strongly protests the perception that has been sought to be created in the public mind, through pro-LTTE websites, as well as by duping even better known media organs such as even the *International Herald Tribune*, which yesterday in an article quoted the Director of this film Mr. Callum Macrae as saying that the film “would be screened at the 22nd Session of the Human Rights Council now underway in Geneva, where the United States plans to introduce a resolution asking Sri Lanka to investigate the allegations of the war crimes by its army”.

Sri Lanka views this film ‘No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka’, which follows the screening of ‘Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields’ (June 2011) and ‘Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished’ (March 2012) screened on the sidelines of previous HRC sessions, as part of a cynical, concerted and orchestrated campaign that is strategically driven and aimed at influencing the debate in the Council on Sri Lanka. It is clearly motivated by collateral political considerations.

Earlier this week, upon coming to learn of this insidious attempt, on 24 February 2013 I drew this matter to the attention of Ambassador Remigiusz Achilles Henczel, President of the Human Rights Council. This was followed up with a meeting with the President on 25 February 2013, where I drew attention to ECOSOC Resolution No. 1996/31 of 25 July 1996 that stipulates the parameters of the consultative relationship between the UN and NGOs, which clearly lists as grounds for suspension and withdrawal of consultative status of NGOs, inter alia, specifically where such an organization either directly or through its affiliates or representatives acting on its behalf, clearly abuses its status by engaging in a pattern of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the charter of the UN including unsubstantiated or politically motivated acts against member states of the UN incompatible with those purposes and principles. This being the third occasion when a Channel 4 film is being showed to coincide with a session of the Human Rights Council, I pointed out that a clear pattern had been established by the NGOs involved, who in the view of the Government of Sri Lanka are abusing their privileged status with ECOSOC.

During my meeting with him, and subsequently by his letter dated 27 February 2013, Ambassador Henczel has disassociated the UN Human Rights Council from today’s event and has observed that

such events “do not reflect an official position of the Council”. He has emphasized that “the organizers of such events, take full responsibility for the content of their events”.

The question the Government of Sri Lanka today wishes to pose from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and FIFDH, is as to whether they can take full responsibility for the contents of this film?

It will take a few days, possibly weeks, before experts in the field would be able to ascertain the true facts about the contents of this film. However, if the two preceding Channel 4 broadcasts are anything to go by in trying to judge the credibility of this film, it does not give us much hope.

- When the original footage, much of which is now recycled, first came out about 3 months after the ending of the conflict in 2009, it was sourced to a shadowy group ‘Journalists for Democracy’. Organizations using the photographs and video footage did so with a disclaimer, that they could not vouch for the authenticity of the material.
- In 2011, as the first in this sequel, ‘Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields’ was brought out, all we had to believe, was Mr. Macrae’s words regard its authenticity.
- The star witness and chief protagonist of the 2011 film Ms. Damilvany Gnanakumar, portrayed as a UK citizen who went to Sri Lanka and got held up due to the fighting and who served as a medical volunteer, later proved to be a member of the LTTE ‘Soodiya’ Regiment and a prominent member of the Tamil Youth Organization (TYO), who unknown to her family went back to Sri Lanka to help ‘Castro’, the LTTE’s point person responsible for coordinating its international network
- Another prominent personality referred to in the film –Ms. Isipriya who was portrayed as a ‘TV announcer’, is a trained LTTE cadre holding the rank of Lt. Colonel, and was responsible for the training of LTTE female suicide cadre
- It turns out that translations at critical points of the film were also consciously distorted to mislead the viewer, such as the point at which civilians are seen being huddled into a trench, seemingly to protect themselves against shelling. However, the comments by the people correctly translated, merely denote their asking not to be filmed, again re-emphasising the stage managed nature of this film.
- Even something as simple as a civilian protest, which is described as a “spontaneous” move in the film, was later proved to have been stage managed by the LTTE.
- The accusation that GOSL denied food and medicine, and deliberately targeted civilians in the ‘no-fire’ zone is completely without basis, and runs contrary to the massive humanitarian operation known to have been carried out by the Sri Lankan security forces, who in the final stages of the conflict, at great risk to themselves, brought back to safety nearly 300,000 civilians including women and children, held as human shields by the LTTE for over a year. It also runs against the fact that the Government of Sri Lanka has successfully rehabilitated and reintegrated 95% of the 11,955 ex-combatants who surrendered or were arrested at the end of the terrorist conflict, including 594 ex-child combatants.

They say justice delayed is justice denied. Similarly so called evidence withheld, for the purpose of crafting a more juicer film in time for the next Human Rights Council, raises questions of the motives of the producers of these films. If the concern was to bring justice to alleged victims, if they believed this material to be authentic, it would be only logical to expect that they present it here and now, rather than the present recycling operation done, with a little more manufacturing each year. But that is precisely what all those who have collaborated in this exercise, are doing.

It is not only the Government of Sri Lanka that has found these annual films to be objectionable. They have been criticized by many, including reputed newspapers such as the Sunday Times of the UK, which in June 2011 described the commentary of past broadcasts of Channel 4 as “intemperate and partisan” and rightly pointed out that most of the footage which was used is “unattributed and uncorroborated”.

While Mr. Macrae who produced this film, and Channel 4 which embraced the project have gone to great lengths to use it to vilify Sri Lanka, they turned down repeated requests by Sri Lanka’s domestic reconciliation mechanism, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), to make available to them a copy of the original footage, so that its authenticity can be verified. It should also be noted that the first ever UK preview of this film was screened at the 3rd Anniversary celebrations of the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) on the 27th of February – two days ago. The GTF is a well known pro-LTTE forum, and the fact that the director of the film saw it fit to preview it at such an occasion clearly exposes that these personalities have been heavily influenced by the propaganda of the pro-LTTE lobby and their skewed views on developments in Sri Lanka. This event establishes, without any doubt, the nexus that exists among the leading critics of the GoSL and the pro-LTTE lobby. The presence particularly of Dr. Yasmin Sooka, Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa, and one of the three authors of the Darusman Report of 2011, makes clear that she is intent on playing prosecutor, judge and jury all in one.

This event, together with several other ‘propaganda stunts’ presently on-going in Geneva and other capitals, as well as to follow in the coming weeks, is but a reminder of the considerable ‘spoiler’ role sections of the pro-LTTE Sri Lankan Tamil expatriates who have become vote banks and pressure groups in several Western countries are intent on playing. While espousing the ideology of the LTTE, using its resources and being manipulated by its surviving military leaders, they pay scant regard to the Tamil community living in the North and the East and other parts of Sri Lanka who having emerged from a 30 year long terrorist conflict, who together with the enlightened sections of the Sri Lankan Tamil expatriates, are keen to re-build their own future and that of their children in a new and peaceful Sri Lanka, in a spirit of reconciliation.

By providing a platform for the screening of this film which includes footage of dubious origin, content that is distorted and without proper sourcing and making unsubstantiated allegations, the sponsors of this event seek to tarnish the image of Sri Lanka and detract from the considerable positive developments that have taken place in the former conflict zones, within less than 4 years since the guns fell silent. A consequence of this action would be the undermining of the ongoing reconciliation process in Sri Lanka. This is not surprising, for like Mr. Macrae and Channel 4, at least two sponsors of today’s event - Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, also refused invitations from the LLRC to testify before the Commission.

I believe the lesson to be drawn from this is, that it is probably easier to cast aspersions from a far and keep the pot boiling, than to contribute towards the ongoing process of reconciliation in Sri Lanka. (Ends)