

**Statement by H E Mrs. Sarala Fernando, Ambassador/Permanent Representative at the Programme Kick Off on Wednesday, 17 January for the Common Humanitarian Action Plan on Sri Lanka**

Madam Chair  
Distinguished Delegates

Sri Lanka is a country that has been engaged for nearly three decades in confronting one of the world's deadliest terrorist groups, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Throughout this time, the Sri Lankan Government has been committed to a politically negotiated settlement to the conflict and has been active both in promoting and protecting human rights and addressing humanitarian concerns while combating terrorism. Even during the years of conflict, we have remained open to international human rights mechanisms and have benefited from their advice to strengthen national protection systems. At the same time, a robust mechanism of transparent consultation and coordination between the UN and international organisations and the Government designated focal points is in our view a pre-requisite for a sound, sustainable partnership on development projects, both at planning and implementation stages.

It should be recalled that when the Ceasefire Agreement was signed with the LTTE, the Government prepared for peace, restoring transportation and rebuilding damaged infrastructure encouraging banks and investors to return to the conflict affected areas and enhancing economic development. Yet, under the cover of the Ceasefire the LTTE was rebuilding its military strength and preparing to return to war. The first clear sign that the LTTE was preparing to resume hostilities came with the shocking assassination of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, a moderate Tamil intellectual who was held in high esteem both nationally and internationally. The assassination resulted in a number of countries including the European Union formally listing the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. For months thereafter, the security forces while in non-combatant status took heavy casualties under LTTE sniper and mine attacks. The Government showed maximum restraint despite severe provocation. The first defensive operation launched by the security forces came only in late July 2006 consequent to the Mavil Aru incident where the LTTE closed down the sluice gate thereby denying water to some 15,000 families downstream which necessitated sending a small contingent of security forces to restore water. In the North and East, LTTE attacks closed down Palaly airport and threatened Trincomalee harbour. In Muttur a predominantly Muslim area, the LTTE forcibly evicted thousands of inhabitants. The Government had thus no alternative in the interest of national security to establish control of these areas and to prevent any further threat of LTTE attacks.

It should also be mentioned that while combating terrorism the security forces are also in the front line to take care of the thousands of civilians who are fleeing from the LTTE and seeking safety in Government controlled areas. The security forces are the first to provide food and water and transportation for IDPs to the nearest welfare/health centres. It is the security forces that have to also repair infrastructure damaged by the LTTE and restore basic amenities.

As a country prone to natural disasters because of the fragile nature of the island's eco system, the security forces are also deployed to rescue persons affected such as by the unprecedented tsunami or the recent severe flooding in the South, the East and the hill

country. These are in fact regular occurrences which leave hundreds of thousands of displaced. The Government has, through its resources, taken care of all these persons in need, arranged shelter and food and will even pay a small sum to enable them to reconstruct their damaged homes upon return. Thanks to a buoyant economy registering above 7% in 2006 despite high oil prices, the Government has been able to allocate a larger share of resources for the care of IDPs in 2007.

It must also be pointed out that Sri Lanka continues to hold its position in the Human Development Index well ahead of others in the region. This is due mainly to extensive national systems of free education, and health which extend throughout the island including the North and East. Throughout the years the Government has continued to fund the entire administration including the Government Agent's offices, doctors, teachers, schools and hospitals in the North and East even though it was a well known fact that the LTTE was appropriating a substantial portion of these resources.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, I would like to state that President Rajapakse has on numerous occasions reiterated his commitment to a negotiated political settlement to the conflict, setting in motion a political process involving all the political parties represented in the Sri Lanka Parliament, supported by a group of experts on legal and constitutional matters, to come up with a solution acceptable to all communities in Sri Lanka. We thank the international community for its support to this process by pressuring the LTTE to renounce terrorism and return to negotiations in good faith. We also thank the donors for supporting Sri Lanka's efforts to take care of all its citizens while facing the twin challenges of terrorism and natural disasters.