

SRI LANKA

Mr President
Excellencies
Madam High Commissioner
Distinguished delegates

I wish to commend the manner in which you, Mr President, have been conducting the work of the Human Rights Council. Our deliberations have been guided by you with skill, aimed at achieving the objectives of our agenda in an equitable manner for all. You have the fullest cooperation and support of my delegation to the work of this body, and especially as we have embarked on an evaluation, 5 years into its establishment.

My delegation appreciates your leadership of the review process of the HRC. Sri Lanka has engaged in this process both in its national capacity and through the Non Aligned Movement with a view to further strengthening the work and the functioning of this body.

On this occasion, as in the past, I have taken the opportunity of meeting the High Commissioner and briefing her on the current developments in Sri Lanka. My delegation looks forward to constructive engagement with the High Commissioner.

Mr. President,

The massive humanitarian operations that were conducted during the final stages of eradicating terrorism, focused on ensuring the safety and security of all civilians and on their rescue from the bondage of terrorism. Expectedly the State, complemented by bilateral partners, multilateral agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations, began delivering on its responsibility of caring for approximately 300,000 displaced persons.

In the post conflict period, the government has been engaged in the most challenging task, firstly, of catering to the needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and thereafter returning to their homes and reintegrating them into society. Only a total of 12,000 IDPs remain in 3 welfare villages functioning in Vavuniya and Jaffna, at present. They will be resettled in their places of origin no sooner the on-going demining operations are complete.

Considerable actions have been taken by the government to facilitate the restoration of normality in the lives of the returning IDPs. These returnees were each provided with a 'package of support' containing food items, material assistance to rebuild houses, irrigation and livelihood support including the provision of land for cultivation and special credit schemes on favourable terms, to ensure their integration into the national economy. Undoubtedly the resettlement process has its challenges, which are addressed when they arise.

Mr President,

Sri Lanka's steadfast commitment to the further promotion and protection of human rights is enshrined in the proposed National Action Plan. The process of formulating this Plan, which prescribes progressive benchmarks to be achieved during a five-year period, is nearing completion, with its implementation to commence in the near future. It is our expectation that the holistic approach we envisage in this Plan encompassing the promotion and protection of all rights, would also supplement the ongoing post-conflict reconciliation process.

The methodology that was adopted in formulating the Plan is significant in that, it is based on a participatory approach, which included civil society organisations. Consequent to stocktaking of the human rights situation in the country, eight thematic areas were identified. The process involved an examination of Sri Lanka's UPR, including civil society submissions and recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms over the past ten years. Drafting Committees on which Government and civil society were equally represented, also considered several proposals, which have been reviewed by an Inter-Ministerial Committee towards them being prioritized and fine-tuned.

Mr President,

To ensure meaningful and effective implementation of the Plan, a process that provides for the input of all stakeholders including those who will assume responsibility for its implementation, was adopted. Due to the primacy of ensuring monitoring and evaluation, an important feature of the Plan is the inclusion of measurable indicators and an identification of responsible actors. While this process has been time consuming, we believe that process is as important as the final product. This will shortly be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers, followed by the launch and implementation in the ensuing months.

Mr President,

The Bureau of the Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation has been further strengthened with a full time Commissioner-General, vested with the special mandate of rehabilitating and reintegrating the 11,696 ex-combatants who were submitted to custody at the end of the armed conflict following due process, which included 594 child combatants. The national programme entitled; Way-Forward on Rehabilitation, Reinsertion and Reintegration (W-RRR), has been formulated based on our own experiences and national and international practices. This programme treats the ex-combatants as "beneficiaries" and implies a move towards not only changing the physical environment of the ex-combatants but also their socio-cultural outlook. Approximately 5,764 of these 'beneficiaries' Mr President, have been released and reintegrated following rehabilitation. Only 4,599 'beneficiaries' are currently in rehabilitation centres.

Mr President,

We have now begun to reap the dividends of peace exemplified by a large number of development programmes to enable the economic uplift of our people. This will underpin and sustain their eventual political empowerment. These development programmes have been acknowledged internationally and have been reflected in various global economic and social indicators. The Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Sri Lanka as the second fastest growing economy in the world and we now enjoy middle-income emerging market status. Sri Lanka's economy grew last year at nearly 8% and the government is conscious of the need to ensure that the benefits of growth are equitably spread across the country. The poverty rate, which was 15.2 in 2006 during the conflict, was halved and stood at 7.6 in 2009, after the end of the conflict. This is the result of political, economic and social stability achieved after thirty years of armed conflict. The high level of investment by Government in this connection will continue unabated.

The government has embarked on an ambitious development programme in the previously war affected Northern Province and Eastern Province including several infrastructure projects. Restoration of the Jaffna-Colombo railway, which was destroyed by the terrorists during the conflict, has commenced. The road network which is being repaired and upgraded, including, as part of the Northern Development Programme the Sangupiddy Bridge, a second connection between the mainland and the Jaffna peninsula, was completed last month, reducing the travel distance between the north and south by 110 kilometres. In order to meet the increased demand for power, the construction of a 500mw thermal power plant in the Eastern city of Trincomalee is proposed. Telecommunication facilities have been expanded across all the districts of the Northern Province and Eastern Province. To further facilitate livelihoods and economic activity in the region, vocational training and access to credit through expansion of the state and private banking network, have been significantly enhanced. It is relevant to point out that the bulk of the vast resources for this accelerated programme has been borne by the Government of Sri Lanka. This demonstrates the commitment of President Mahinda Rajapakse's government to meet and overcome some of the post conflict challenges.

Mr President,

As we informed this body last year, an important step in the Government's reconciliation programme is the "The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission" (LLRC), appointed by His Excellency the President. This Commission commenced its work in August 2010 with an emphasis on restorative justice. It will also focus attention on determining responsibility regarding past events related to the conflict. The mandate of the Commission has been extended, given the larger number of persons seeking to testify before the LLRC.

The LLRC has conducted several public hearings in Colombo and in the areas of the former theatre of conflict in the north and the east, with a view to obtaining views and accounts of people impacted by the conflict. LLRC hearings have also been held in places of detention, rehabilitation, and IDP welfare centres in the conflict affected areas, and have been recently concluded.

Mr President,

Another significant milestone in the work of this Commission has been the establishment of the Inter-Agency Advisory Committee (IAAC) under the chairmanship of the Hon. Attorney-General. The Commission has been able to use the mechanism of the IAAC to facilitate early implementation of its interim recommendations. These include, seeking measures for the speedy disposal of cases relating to persons in detention in keeping with due process, to ensure family members are informed in the event of the change of location of detention, use of private land in former conflict areas, and the disarming of any remaining illegal armed groups. Further, administrative changes relating to the use of both official languages in business with government and facilitation of closer interaction between people and provincial authorities, as guaranteed by the Constitution, have also been recommended.

Mr. President,

Towards the implementation of these interim recommendations, the Government of Sri Lanka has sought the transfer of 676 ex-combatant detainees for rehabilitation and subsequent release. This reduction will make it possible to close one of two detention centres in the country. Additionally, the collection of unauthorized weaponry is an on-going process that began in the East and is continuing in the North. The High Security Zones are being progressively reduced in extent and land in these areas is available to be restored to its rightful owners.

Mr President,

We note with deep concern that remnants of the defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) international network continue its criminal activities and its secessionist agenda. With the Group remaining a proscribed terrorist organisation in a number of countries we are pleased to note that pro-LTTE groups, their associates and operatives are being held accountable for their unlawful activities by those Governments. I would hasten to strike a note of caution against being lulled into a sense of complacency as we have learnt that the unlawful activities of the groups continue to this day.

Mr. President,

I would like to share some of the very recent developments in this context.

Recently, the authorities of a country arrested 10 individuals and searched 23 premises, in a coordinated operation. Those arrested are members of this terrorist group and are accused, amongst other offences, of money laundering and membership of a criminal organization. In the course of the investigation it has been substantiated that the Tamil diaspora had been forced to financially support this terrorist organization. The accused have compelled other members of the Tamil diaspora, to borrow excessive amounts of money on their behalf.

Also in another country, a member of the Tamil Coordinating Committee and 3 others have been indicted on terrorism related charges pertaining to the alleged purchase of equipment for the terrorist organisation.

In yet another country, recently, funds of the World Tamil Movement have been frozen following links to this terrorist movement. In the past other countries have also taken action and we express the hope that the international community continues to remain vigilant in order to prevent this kind of activity, which could destabilise a sovereign nation.

It is against this backdrop that clarion calls for the rollback of our Emergency Regulations (ERs), must be considered. While Sri Lanka has taken extensive measures since the end of the conflict to repeal nearly 80% of the provisions of its ERs, the bare minimum that remains are required as safeguards against such ongoing unlawful activities of this group. Moreover, the government is continuing to closely monitor the situation in order to repeal the remaining provisions in a manner that does not compromise national security. We believe that it is our authorities which would be the best placed in making this judgement. We assure the Council that the rollback process of the ERs will be concluded in an appropriate and timely manner.

Mr President,

President Rajapaska in his address to the UNGA in October 2010 observed that, and I quote 'a great deal has been said by those beyond our border about our Tamil community. Let me be clear, no nation on earth can wish Sri Lanka's Tamil community more good fortune than Sri Lanka itself, I say, do not allow yourselves to become an instrument of division, hate and violence, to be used as an enabler for hatred to be reborn in another form. Rather come, let us join hands, and break the bonds of mistrust to rise to new horizons. Sri Lanka recognises the challenges we face among the greatest of which is healing the wounds of the recent past' unquote. Over the past year, many expatriate Tamils visited Sri Lanka and re-united with their families, unhindered by a situation of violence.

The Tamil political mainstream is now fully engaged with the Government as part of a wider group - the Tamil Political Parties Forum – in an ongoing dialogue on economic development, and legal and Constitutional reforms. Having met twice already, they are scheduled to meet again early next month.

Mr President,

In the course of 2010 and 2011, Sri Lanka's reports to 3 of the treaty bodies, namely the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women were examined. The Government is examining the recommendations of the respective committees in order to implement them as appropriate under the aegis of the National Action Plan. This is indicative of Sri Lanka's continuous commitment to engage and cooperate with the United Nations system and its mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Mr President,

In conclusion, Sri Lanka looks forward to continuing its constructive dialogue in the spirit of cooperation with the HRC and other international partners, in a spirit of mutual respect.

Thank you.