

Statement by the Delegation of Sri Lanka during the Interactive Dialogue with the Representative of the UNSG on human rights of IDPs, and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

8 March 2010

Mr. President,

At the outset, my delegation wishes to place on record our sincere appreciation of the approach adopted by the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, founded upon the principle of constructive engagement and candid dialogue first and foremost with our national authorities, and now, through the medium of this Council. The points of concern raised and the registration of the positive aspects of the Sri Lankan situation, especially the manner in which they were articulated, exemplifies a balanced and professional approach expected of a mandate holder.

Mr. President,

The Representative acknowledges the positives in rapid resettlement and the granting of the freedom of movement to those who have yet to be resettled. In May 2009, the total case load amounted to over 270,000 persons. We commenced release of categories of vulnerable IDPs on humanitarian grounds within 3 months after the end of armed operations, starting with the resettlement process. The IDPs housed in welfare villages were granted freedom of movement in December after screening and registration.

We have to date released 180,000 persons from welfare villages through humanitarian releases and the resettlement programme. 27,000 persons have left on temporary passes. We expect that they will return if they wish to avail themselves of assisted resettlement. This leaves us with approximately 65,000 persons in Vavuniya and less than 4,000 elsewhere of which some are receiving medical treatment. Given the challenges of demining, paucity of resources and restoration of damaged and decayed physical infrastructure, our achievement is nothing short of being remarkable in this timeframe. Further, in the same manner, we are committed to resettling the remaining IDPs within the shortest duration. Concerted action is being taken to complete demining, restore infrastructure and rationalize the extent of high security zones in the north. The remaining challenges include managing the transition from humanitarian assistance to restoring livelihoods and eventually, development of the region. With regard to access, over 45 international and national non-governmental organizations and UN agencies are present in the Northern Province. Over 20 of them are also engaged in work in areas of return on the basis of Government approved projects.

We are also addressing our minds to the complex issue of protracted displacement caused by the mass expulsion of communities from the North over 2 decades ago by the terrorists. We thank the representative for facilitating the National Consultation on their situation in 2008.

Sri Lanka commits to working closely with the Representative and looks forward to reporting to this Council in the near future on the resettlement of the last of the displaced.

Mr. President,

My delegation also takes note of the report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances submitted to this Session.

Sri Lanka maintains a close dialogue with the Working Group through regular contacts with its Secretariat and interacting with its members during their meetings in Geneva. These regular contacts have facilitated the Government to brief the Working Group on the current efforts being undertaken to investigate into and clarify the existing cases. My delegation appreciates the cooperation and support we have received from the Working Group and its Secretariat in these efforts.

With regard to clarifying the existing cases, the Government recently submitted two lists with possible 459 instances where the name of the same person has been recorded more than once and we appreciate the efforts undertaken by the Working Group to review 171 of these cases within a short period of time. The Working Group has now concluded that these cases were multiple recording of names and we hope that the review of the remaining cases will soon be concluded. Furthermore, the Government of Sri Lanka has facilitated the Working Group in clarifying a number of cases in the recent past.

Following a careful analysis it appears that only 3 cases had taken place in 2009 indicating a downward trend of disappearances over previous years. The Government will keep the Working Group informed of the progress made in clarifying the recent as well as past cases, which have been brought to our attention. The lack of precise information makes this an arduous and time consuming task.

Sri Lanka has taken note of the recent requests made by the Working Group to conduct a mission to Sri Lanka, in addition to the three visits already undertaken by the Group in 1991, 1992 and 1999. While we continue our regular contacts with the members of the Working Group and its Secretariat, the government will actively consider, among its other priorities, the current request for a visit.

Thank you Mr. President