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**Statement by the delegation of Sri Lanka during the
ANNUAL FULL-DAY DISCUSSION ON WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS**

Good practices and remaining gaps in the prevention of violence against women

At the outset, my delegation expresses its appreciation to the President of the HRC for convening the annual full day discussion on Women's human rights and the panellists for their insightful contribution to this discussion. Sri Lanka has long espoused the tradition of ensuring the rights for women, in law and practice. We believe that the elimination of violence against women requires holistic measures to address inequality and discrimination, and that there could be no one-size fits all approach. Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women have been a focus of successive governments in Sri Lanka, while maintaining a gender neutral recruitment policy supported by Constitutional guarantees of equality. We have witnessed a remarkable improvement in the situation of women which has been made possible due to the increased sensitivity to their gender issues and a firm government policy that seeks to empower women and address their grievances. Attitudinal changes that favour the position of women in society have been possible largely due to high levels of educational attainment and women being thereby recognized as equal partners and valuable contributors to the development process.

Sri Lanka continues to be seized of this issue and its wider implications for the promotion and protection of human rights, as we grapple with the multitude of post-conflict challenges. We are pleased to inform the Council that the GoSL has been successfully engaged in the task of rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-combatants. All female ex-combatants who were beneficiaries of this programme have now been released and are back with their families. Underage ex-combatants, who had been forcibly recruited by the terrorists, have all undergone rehabilitation with those who wished to pursue their education being given every opportunity to do so. Others have

been engaged in vocational training and other empowerment programmes. They are all now re-united with their families.

A number of measures have also been undertaken for the protection of violence against women in the former theatre of conflict including through the establishment of additional women and children's desks at police stations and the recruitment of Tamil-speaking officers, both men and women.

Legal reforms to strengthen the substantive and procedural laws of Sri Lanka have been undertaken and have resulted in the enactment of progressive legislation. My delegation wishes to state that the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act and Penal Code of Sri Lanka contain prohibitions against impious attacks on women. In fact our laws on the amelioration of women's rights have been legislated in consonance with the Constitutional provision which states that there should be no discrimination on the ground of sex and that special laws must be enacted to promote women's rights. Several committees have been appointed to go into the personal laws in the country and ascertain how best discriminatory practices inherent in such laws can be eliminated.

The National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights 2011-16, which has now been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for consideration, contains a number of measures to be undertaken for the reduction of incidents involving violence against women. These include, among others, the review of existing legislation to identify gaps as well as to introduce new legislation and ensure effective implementation including of the Plan of Action supporting the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act; further strengthening of the women and children's desks at the police departments and measures to combat sexual harassment at work places through the establishment of cells with powers to deal with grievances.

Sri Lanka looks forward to interacting with the HRC with regard to action taken in the protection of human rights of women and to share best practices adopted in this regard.