



**THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE DEMOCRATIC
SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA TO THE UNITED
NATIONS OFFICE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA**

65th Session of the Executive Committee
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Agenda Item 4 (General Debate)

Statement by

Mrs. Samantha Jayasuriya,
Charge d' Affaires a.i. &
Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka

(Geneva, 2nd October 2014)

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset Sri Lanka wishes to congratulate you for your able leadership and the inclusive, open and transparent manner in which you are steering the work of this important meeting. We note with interest the Opening Statement of the High Commissioner, which provided a detailed overview of the work undertaken and the challenges faced by the UNHCR over the past year. We appreciate the insightful remarks made by the United Nations Secretary-General and for his engagement with the Member States.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka recognizes the important role of the UNHCR in providing protection, assistance and durable solutions to millions of displaced people around the world, particularly in the regions of Africa and other areas that are grappling with emergency situations including conflicts, in recent times. We extend our sincere appreciation for the support extended by the UNHCR towards Sri Lanka's post-conflict resettlement programme, since the end of a nearly three-decades long terrorist conflict. We are, especially appreciative of the provision of shelter grants and basic household items for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), and for facilitating the process of their voluntary return to original habitats.

We are committed to engage with the UNHCR in an open and constructive manner notwithstanding that the country's operational environment has shifted from a phase of humanitarian relief to recovery and full-fledged development. I wish to recall the Meeting Mr. Lalith Weeratunge, Secretary to the President of Sri Lanka and also the Chairman of the Committee monitoring the National Plan of Action on implementation of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) Recommendations, had with the High Commissioner of UNHCR in January 2014 in Geneva, where we had the opportunity to exchange views on matters of mutual interest. As part of our regular interaction with the UN system, Sri Lanka facilitated a visit to the country by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs, Dr. Chaloka Beyani from 02-06 December 2013. During the visit he was provided with unfettered access including interactions with civil society and field visits, in coordination with a range of focal agencies including the UNHCR. At the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur in June 2014, following his visit, he acknowledged that "the Government has made significant progress, together

with national and international partners, to facilitate the return or relocation of some 760,000 IDPs.”

Following a series of consultations with the UNHCR, the Government was able to reconcile the discrepancies in the IDP figures. Accordingly, as of August 2014, only a total of 26,056 persons (7,840 families) remain to be resettled, which includes 21,747 persons (6,498 families) from the North and 4,309 persons (1,342 families) from the East.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Sri Lanka has implemented a comprehensive and coherent policy for the resettlement of IDPs since the end of the conflict in May 2009. Its policy on IDP resettlement is in line with accepted principles in achieving durable solutions for IDPs.

During this resettlement process, priority was given to demining of an estimated area of 2,064 sq.km. contaminated with landmines and UXOs. As of June this year, 96 percent of the demining has been completed.

On housing needs of IDPs, as at July 2014, 61,831 fully damaged houses have been reconstructed and 9,104 partly damaged houses have been renovated. The Government and other agencies have further committed to reconstructing 9,578 fully damaged houses and renovating 2,291 partly damaged houses during 2014 and 2015.

The Government has also made considerable investment in the North and the East in establishing major infrastructure facilities and in providing livelihood activities aimed at economic empowerment of the returnees.

The data processing phase of the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) on resettled IDPs carried out by the Government with the Humanitarian Country Team (HC) supported by UNOCHA is nearing completion. The final report of the JNA is expected by October 2014. The outcome which is based on a survey conducted in 9 districts, including in the five districts of the Northern Province, will enable the Government to address residual displacement needs.

We believe the post conflict transformation that has taken place in my country within a span of 5 years is a success story on how a developing country that faced a protracted conflict for over 30 years responded to an unprecedented humanitarian challenge.

The people who have left the country during the conflict have now begun to return and as of today, a total number of 6674 persons belonging to 1539 families have returned to the country from Tamil Nadu. We appreciate the assistance given by the UNHCR and IOM in this process.

Sri Lanka has successfully resolved the question of statelessness, with the adoption of the Granting of Citizenship of Persons of Indian Origin Act, which enabled 506,000 persons of Indian Origin to secure Sri Lanka citizenship.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Sri Lanka has been accommodating refugees/ asylum seekers in the country. In this regard, Sri Lanka has been facilitating the work of the UNHCR as per the working arrangement between the Government and the UNHCR in 2006, with regard to the issuance of certificates by the UNHCR to asylum seekers/refugees.

During the last two years Sri Lanka witnessed an almost 700% increase in the arrival of asylum seekers/refugees. By June 2014 there were 1606 applicants and 321 refugees, Regrettably, the process of resettlement slowed down considerably in 2013/14, resulting in serious law & order, security, as well as health related issues for Sri Lanka.

However, being sensitive to the humanitarian aspects of asylum seekers/refugees, the Government has sought UNHCR's assistance in addressing related issues through the following measures:

- the establishment of a safe house/welfare centre for those identified as refugees until they are accepted for resettlement in a third country;
- the regularization of the process of return of asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected, as at present, once rejected, UNHCR bears no responsibility for the welfare or return of rejected asylum-seekers;
- expediting the process of resettlement to ensure its completion within a short period of time; and

- ensuring that asylum seekers are provided with adequate facilities and monetary assistance to live in Sri Lanka until their claims are processed or resettlement is found.

However, these issues remain yet to be resolved. We also take this opportunity to request refugee receiving countries to expedite the processes of finalising resettlement claims and to also assist UNHCR to enhance its resource capacity.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka reiterates it's willingness to work closely with the UNHCR and continue engagement on matters of mutual interest and Mr. High Commissioner we wish success in your endeavours.

Thank you.