



A D D R E S S

by

**Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe,
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of Sri Lanka**

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(check against delivery)

Mr. President,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you and the members of the Bureau on the exemplary manner in which you are guiding this Council during the first year of its establishment. My delegation shares the view expressed by many delegations that at this critical stage, the Council should place primary focus on completing its institutional-building procedures in order to meet the expectations stipulated in the founding UNGA Resolution 60/251. Towards this end, my delegation will show maximum flexibility in order to promote consensual outcomes, thereby contributing to the spirit of dialogue and cooperation envisaged as the guiding principles of the new Council.

Mr. President,

Since my last briefing to this Council, one of the major developments that have taken place in Sri Lanka is the establishment of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry to investigate and inquire into alleged violations of human rights. The International Independent Group of Eminent Persons appointed to observe the functions of this Commission of Inquiry, also met in Colombo in February and had initial positive interactions with the local Commissioners. The eleven-member International Independent Group of Eminent Persons chaired by Hon. Justice P.N. Bhagawati from India, is comprised of eminent persons nominated by Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Japan, Netherlands, U.K, U.S.A., and the EU as well as drawn from lists provided by OHCHR and IPU. The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to provide all necessary assistance to the Presidential Commission and to the International Independent Group, in order to carry-out their tasks in accordance with relevant national laws as well as international norms and standards. The Government of Sri Lanka will continue to brief this Council on the progress being made by these bodies in the spirit of open and constructive engagement on matters relating to the promotion and protection of human rights in Sri Lanka.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the OHCHR, in particular its Rule of Law Division for the valuable advice and support extended to the Presidential Commission of Inquiry and relevant national institutions in specific areas such as witness protection, which are pioneering initiatives in the region.

Mr. President,

I would like to take this opportunity to brief this Council on recent developments with regard to the humanitarian situation in the North and East of the country where the Government under trying circumstances, continues to find short-term and long-term solutions for the IDPs affected both by the conflict and natural disaster.

On 27th February, I led an International Needs Assessment Mission to Batticaloa District in the East of the country, joined by Ambassadors of France, Germany, Italy, Japan, USA and the EU as well as UN and Government officials. As we descended from the helicopter in Batticaloa, the LTTE launched a mortar attack on the group. Despite the shock and some injuries, the Mission was able to complete its task of assessing the resettlement process in Vaharai, from where more than 34,000 civilians escaping from the LTTE had sought Government protection. The Government is in the process of commencing the resettlement of these IDP's on voluntary basis in their original places of residence, after demining and providing security, restoring essential infrastructure and services. Electricity has already been restored and administrative structure, including health facilities and schooling are being established.

On 14th February, I also led a similar mission to assess the situation on the supply of food and other essential supplies to Jaffna in the North of the country and to follow-up on the recommendations made by the UN logistics mission, which conducted an assessment of the situation on the invitation of the Government of Sri Lanka. Despite LTTE threats and attacks on ships carrying food and essential items, the Government continues to assure monthly requirements to the North and has now supplied more than 75,000 metric tons of supplies by the sea route since the land route was closed due to LTTE attacks since August 2006. We must acknowledge with appreciation the valuable assistance of the international community and UN Agencies which are associated with the Government in this programme. Providing of supplies to civilians has been a key priority of the Government.

Despite grave provocations and attacks by the LTTE, the Government announced in February that the Cease-fire Agreement remains valid and that the Government remains committed to finding a negotiated political settlement, as reflected in its willingness to resume peace talks with the LTTE as well as the other measures it is taking to find political consensus. An all Party representative committee is currently in advance stage

in formulating Constitutional proposals for devolution, with a view to meeting aspirations of all communities.

Mr. President,

As an active and engaged founder member of the Council, Sri Lanka continues its open and constructive engagement with special procedure mechanisms of this Council. I would like to inform you that in keeping with the traditional practice, the Government has extended invitations to two mandate holders, namely the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Special Representative of the Secretary General on the Human Rights of IDPs to undertake visits to Sri Lanka in October and November this year respectively. We hope that constructive recommendations, which could be implemented, would emanate from these visits.

Mr. President,

While making all efforts to address concerns of alleged violations of human rights through effective action, the Government of Sri Lanka continues to place emphasis on preventive measures. Last week, a meeting was held for the Officers-in-Charge of police stations in many parts of Sri Lanka, chaired by the Inspector General of Police, in order to brief them on the effective implementation of the Presidential Directive on Arrests and Detentions to ensure that the fundamental rights of persons as enshrined in the Constitution are respected and protected on the ground, even in difficult circumstances of combating terrorism. This is in addition to numerous initiatives that are being taken on regular basis by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights, which meets once a month under my Chairmanship, which has proven to be an effective tool in the monitoring of specific allegations of human rights violations and adopting practical measures to address concerns.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by a few words on technical cooperation and capacity-building. The OHCHR technical cooperation and capacity-building Division is a fundamental pillar of OHCHR which needs to be promoted as both development-friendly and for sustainable

orientation. Over the last year, my Ministry has engaged with OHCHR on several initiatives and will continue this open dialogue. In keeping with Sri Lanka's pledge to promote treaty body reform and at our request, OHCHR has provided useful technical cooperation for the preparation of the single core reporting document under the harmonized reporting system, which is a pioneering initiative intended to test whether the reporting burden could be reduced.

As a concrete measure of our support for OHCHR, we have last week honoured our pledge to make a donation of US\$ 10,000 to the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation.

Thank you