Statement by the Delegation of Sri Lanka to the United Nations

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Agenda Item 65: Promotion and protection of the rights of children
18th October, 2013

Mr. Chair,

We thank the Secretary-General for his reports on this agenda item.

In a pioneering Save the Children study released this September, “The South Asian Report on the Child-friendliness of Governments”, Sri Lanka scored the highest on the “child-friendliness index.” We also scored extremely well on health, education and child protection outcomes. We are indeed encouraged that Sri Lanka’s dedicated efforts in partnership with UNICEF and Civil Society in creating an overall enabling environment for its children, has made a transformational impact on the lives of our children.

Mr. Chair,

As a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, and the two ILO Conventions (No. 138 and 182) dealing with child labour, Sri Lanka takes its international obligations seriously. In addition, the Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees equality to all citizens, and also allows for special provisions to be made for the advancement of women, children and disabled persons, reflecting the recognition for special affirmative action in the case of vulnerable groups (Articles 12 (10, (20, (3) and (4) and 27 (6)).

Some of our landmark efforts to update the institutional, legal and regulatory framework to better respect, safeguard and protect the rights of children are as follows:
• The National Child Protection Authority is the dedicated agency working on child protection issues.

• The National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (NHRAP), a direct outcome of the Universal Periodic Review Process, has a thematic section on children. The focus areas include health and nutrition, juvenile justice, children affected by armed conflict, adolescent health and wellbeing, early childhood care and development, early education, child labour and alternative care.

• Section 358A of the Penal Code based on the International Labour Organization Convention No.182 criminalizes forms of child labour, covering debt bondage and serfdom, forced or compulsory labour, and slavery.

• The Penal Code Amendment of 2006 significantly widened the definition of human trafficking and strengthened Sri Lanka’s laws regarding the sale of children and child prostitution. It prohibits cybercrimes (sexual abuse, child pornography) against children, holding IT service providers accountable for such crimes. It also criminalizes the soliciting of a child for sexual purposes and the recruitment of children for armed combat. An important aspect of this amendment is that it includes psycho-social and mental trauma in the definition of injuries for reparation.

• In order to improve the efficacy and speed of the judicial process for child abuse victims, the Attorney General’s Department maintains a separate unit, the Prosecution of Child Abuse Offenders Unit. The resources for the project are provided by the Government of Sri Lanka and UNICEF.

• In conformity with Article 28(2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, corporal punishment as a disciplinary method is strictly prohibited. School Child Protection Committees (SCPC) have been set up on a directive of the Ministry of Justice as a monitoring mechanism.
• Village Alert Groups set up by The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) and Village Committees set up by the Department of Probation and Child Care Services together monitor offences against children. School teachers are also provided training in child counseling.

• Women & Children’s Bureau Desks have been established in most Police Stations across the country to deal with child/women victims of abuse and violence. In areas where such desks are absent, female officers have been assigned to respond to complaints of women and children.

• At the regional level, Sri Lanka has actively participated in the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC) and is developing an action plan under it, covering critical issues such as corporal punishment, sexual abuse and exploitation, child trafficking, child labour and early marriage.

• Sri Lankan children have access to the child help hotlines set up by the National Child Protection Authority with assistance from Child Helpline International based in the Netherlands.

Mr. Chair,

The children of Sri Lanka grow up in a comparatively benevolent socio-economic environment. The success of our policies and programmes for children is largely due to the continued focus on service delivery to rural areas, where the majority of the Sri Lankan population resides. A well-developed rural family healthcare system combined with the traditional knowledge of mothers and midwives on maternal health have contributed to very low infant (9.4 per 1000 live births in 2012) and maternal mortality (35 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010) rates. 98% of births in the country take place in healthcare facilities, and birth registration is over 92%. Immunization is universal. Sri Lanka also monitors the quality and safety of its infant mild products.
Maternity leave is generous with 84 days of paid leave, followed by another 84 days of half paid leave.

Absolute poverty in Sri Lanka declined from 15.2% in 2006/07 to 6.5% in 2012, surpassing the MDG mid-term target. Poverty levels in the former conflict affected regions have kept pace with the national levels. Impressively, the multi-dimensionally poor in Sri Lanka stands at 1.9%, thanks to strong performances in access to safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity, nutrition and schooling. The goal of universal primary education will be easily achieved by 2015, with the nett enrollment rate having reached 99% in 2010 and this includes the North and the East. Over 1020 schools have been restored in the former conflict affected areas since 2009. All children are back at school. The recent introduction of the Child Centric Budget Analysis (CCBA) will also ensure that a special budgetary analysis is carried out to ensure that children become more visible in government economic policies.

Mr. Chair,

Despite the gains we have made, Sri Lanka is not without its share of challenges. Maternal and child malnutrition in certain geographic pockets remain a major challenge. Cases of child abuse are being reported in the media, which has increased public awareness and vigilance. The UNICEF campaign on a ‘Violence Free Society for Children’ seeks to break the culture of silence and prevent child abuse. Therefore, we will redouble our efforts to continue our partnership with UN agencies, donor governments, civil society and private sector actors to address these issues, further consolidate and advance women’s and children’s rights, development and protection throughout the country.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.