SRI LANKA

Statement

by

H.E. Palitha Kohona

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations

at the

Third Committee

on agenda item 69:

"Promotion and Protection of Human Rights"

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(Please check against delivery)
Mr. Chair,

As it has done since independence, Sri Lanka has continued its people centric approach to social and economic development accompanied by a decisive electoral mandate from her people. The debilitating terrorist conflict is over and every effort is now being expended to consolidate the hard won peace by further strengthening our democratic institutions, while proactively seeking reconciliation and promoting human rights.

In our international relations, we have continued our constructive engagement with UN mechanisms, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Human Rights Council, the Special Procedure Mandate Holders, treaty bodies, the UPR, and, of course, our bilateral partners.

Sri Lanka continues to record high indicators in the Human Development Index, consistent with our obligations under the Convention on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. As highlighted by President Rajapaksa in his address to the General Assembly, Sri Lanka, despite being a middle income country, at the lower end of the scale, has achieved or is well on the way to achieving the MDGs. The statistics speak for themselves. Sri Lanka was ranked high out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index in 2012. 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 multidimensionally poor in Sri Lanka stands at 1.9%, thanks to strong performances in access to safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity, nutrition and schooling. Most villages in the country are now connected to the national grid. As we emphasise the role of youth in government policies, focused education and skills development remains a priority. 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. The age of compulsory secondary education has been increased to 16. A large number of our students go onto benefit from free tertiary education provided at the state’s expense. There are 16 universities. The remaining numbers of students who do not enroll in private tertiary institutions access technical colleges, which provide training in a range of subjects spanning information technology to entrepreneurial skills. Two of the fully functioning universities are in the North and the East, and 8 of the technical
colleges are located in these provinces. The key dividend from this strong educational infrastructure has been the reduction of the unemployment level to a low of 3.9% in 2012. In many countries this would constitute to full employment. Poverty levels in the former conflict affected regions have kept pace with the national levels.

Sri Lanka has maintained a stable economy while transitioning from a humanitarian phase to a development and reconciliation phase. To realise this objective, significant state resources have been channelled to the North and the East. The total investment by the Government for development projects in the Northern Province during the 2006 to 2011 amounts to approximately US$ 3 Billion. 225 branches of banks and 76 finance and leasing companies have been established in the Northern Province since 2009. The Northern Province has recorded a GDP growth rate of 25.9% for 2012, the highest growth rate in any Province, thereby contributing 4.0% to the national economy. The Eastern Province registered the second highest growth of 25% in the GDP.

Mr. Chair,

While reaching out to care for all our people’s needs, the Government has also taken a proactive approach to post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. The Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), established by the Government to make recommendations on the reasons for the conflict and to avoid a repetition, has made 280 recommendations. The National Plan of Action on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the LLRC seeks to implement these. The National Plan of Action is substantially consistent with the National Plan of Action on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, an outcome of Sri Lanka's engagement with the Universal Periodic Review since 2008. The goal of the Government is to address the development needs of the people and also implement the recommendations of the LLRC with a view to achieving sustainable reconciliation.

Allow me to highlight some of the key legislative, administrative, institutional and confidence building measures implemented so far.
A week-long visit to Sri Lanka was undertaken by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in August this year, following an invitation the Government had extended to her in April 2011. The High Commissioner had unfettered access to visit all parts of the country, including the former conflict-affected areas of the North and the East. She met with a wide spectrum of persons from the Government and the Opposition, members of civil society, and men, women and children affected by the conflict. She addressed the youth parliament. The High Commissioner met human rights activists, who also continue to actively participate in the HRC sessions, in Geneva and return to Sri Lanka.

In July 2013 the Government accepted an additional 53 recommendations of the LLRC to be incorporated into the National Plan of Action for Implementation. The implementation of the LLRC recommendations is overseen by the Secretary to the President of Sri Lanka and over 22 Ministries have been tasked to implement these so far. Over one billion rupees have been allocated for this exercise. Progress with regard to the implementation of the LLRC recommendations, are shared with the diplomatic community and the United Nations.

Mr. Chair,

Sri Lanka has enabled a strong human rights protection framework by giving domestic effect, as a State Party, to seven core human rights treaties, other related international instruments, and the four Geneva Conventions. Our Constitution comprehensively guarantees fundamental rights which are enforced through the judiciary. Sri Lanka appeared before the 14th Session of the UPR on November 1, 2012. We have maintained consistently that the UPR mechanism is the most appropriate platform to address the human rights situations of all countries in a uniform, objective and constructive spirit.

As part of our ongoing engagement with the special procedures mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur on IDPs will visit Sri Lanka in December this year. We have also invited the Special Rapporteur on Education to visit Sri Lanka in January 2014. We will continue to entertain requests for visits by special procedures mandate holders.

With specific reference to the OHCHR, Sri Lanka notes the challenges faced by this Office, particularly with regard to the budget, which is paramount to the effective and independent
discharge of the mandate of the High Commissioner. We believe that there is an urgent need for a more sustainable resourcing under the administrative direction and authority of the UN Secretary General and the General Assembly. To this end, Sri Lanka believes that the bulk of the OHCHR funding must come from the UN regular budget. There is also a consistent need to enhance the predictability and transparency of planning and funding of the OHCHR activities. With regard to thematic work, we highlight the need for the OHCHR as well as the community of nations to redouble efforts in mainstreaming economic, social and cultural rights, which remain disproportionately marginalized.

Mr. Chair,

While we will listen to friends as we address our challenges relating to reconciliation, prescriptions developed elsewhere may not always suit our socio-cultural needs. We will continue to work with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, and liaise with our friends. We also call for constructive, fair, non-selective and objective assessments of our post-conflict situation based on the ground realities. We note with satisfaction that the survey “Commonwealth Compared 2013” listed Sri Lanka at the 14th position in the Commonwealth on criteria such as press freedom, democracy and inequality.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.