



Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, Geneva

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Ambassador Aryasinha presents credentials to Pope Benedict XVI.

Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva Ravinatha Aryasinha, who is concurrently accredited to the Holy See, presented his credentials to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the 13th of December 2012 at a ceremony held at the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State of the Holy See, and other high officials of the Vatican, also attended the ceremony which was held to mark the presentation of credentials of Non-resident Ambassadors from Zambia, Thailand, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Niger, Guinea and Sri Lanka.

Addressing the six new Ambassadors, Pope Benedict XVI noted the importance of education, referring to it as one of the principal challenges of the present time. He further invited the countries represented by the ambassadors to contribute to the education of the new generation by promoting a healthy anthropology, saying that it is "the essential basis for all true education, and consonant with our common natural heritage." His Holiness noted further that countries, should as a starting point, review the various problems that exist within those countries, especially where certain political and economic policies may risk a gradual erosion of 'anthropological and spiritual heritages, which have been refined through the centuries and patiently constructed on foundations that respect the essence of the human person in all its variety and in perfect harmony with the cosmos.' In his concluding remarks, Pope Benedict XVI extended his greetings to the Catholic communities in the countries represented by the Ambassadors, highlighting the crucial role that the Church plays in the advancement of their countries, particularly in the area of education of children and young people.

In his message to the Holy Father, Ambassador Aryasinha traced the historic relations between the Holy See and Sri Lanka and noted the constructive contribution of the Church towards the areas of education, healthcare, social services and post-conflict development in the country. He explained the significant developments taking place in Sri Lanka since the restoration of peace in

the country, in the areas of resettlement of the displaced, re-integration of ex-combattants, reconciliation between all communities, economic and infrastructure advancements in the former conflict affected areas as well as other parts of the country, and the noteworthy growth in the tourist sector. Ambassador Aryasinha, in his message, said "as Sri Lanka builds on a new era of peace, stability and equality, where the multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic dimension that the country is renowned takes primacy the pivotal role that can be played by religious leaders in this regard, had been readily recognized". Noting "the important contribution and dedication of the Roman Catholic Church towards inter-religious dialogue and socio-cultural development in Sri Lanka", Ambassador Aryasinha made special mention of "the valuable services rendered by His Eminence Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith". He also appreciated the "contribution made towards this end by the Holy See through the Apostolic Nuncio in Colombo, and the generous donor assistance by Caritas International and its associated charities".

In correlation to the theme addressed by the Holy Father, Ambassador Aryasinha expressed the country's deep commitment toward the advancement of younger generations as key to the country's post-conflict rebuilding and reconciliation process. He explained that the Government was infusing "more capital from the national budget to strengthen sectors such as education and health, to ensure the well being and development of children and youth, in whose hands the future of the country lies".

During his visit to the Vatican Ambassador Aryasinha also met with His Eminence Cardinal Bertone and the Heads of a number of pontifical councils on the side lines of the main ceremony, where he was able to provide a full brief of developments taking place in Sri Lanka and explore areas of mutual interest.

The complete message presented by Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha to His Holiness is attached.

Sri Lanka Permanent Mission

Geneva

17 December 2012

**Message presented by
His Excellency Ravinatha Pandukabhaya Aryasinha,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri
Lanka to the Holy See at the Ceremony of the Presentation of Credentials to
His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI - 13 December 2012**

It is with utmost honour that I present to Your Holiness, on this, the 13th day of December of the year 2012, the Letters of Credence issued by His Excellency Mahinda Raapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, appointing me as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the Holy See. On this important occasion, it is fitting that I convey to Your Holiness the warm greetings and respect of His Excellency the President, the Government and the people of Sri Lanka, and their best wishes for your good health, long life and personal well being. May I also take this opportunity to convey to Your Holiness the appreciation of the Government of Sri Lanka for the excellent cooperation and courtesies extended by the Holy See to my predecessor.

The strong and continuing good relations between Sri Lanka and the Holy See have a rich and robust history, which dates back to the 5th Century. After the establishment of formal diplomatic relations on 15th February 1976, our two countries have continued to strengthen ties and build on areas of further cooperation. With a Roman Catholic population of more than 7%, the historic visits between Sri Lanka and the Holy See have been of special significance to Sri Lanka's populace over the millennia. The momentous visits by His Holiness Pope Paul VI in 1970, and His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1995 are still warmly and respectfully recalled to this day. His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa had the honour to pay two official visits to the Holy See, since his election to the Presidency as a manifestation of the close and friendly ties. Allow me to also recall on this occasion, the audience President Rajapaksa was afforded with Your Holiness in June this year, and the fruitful discussions which took place during that visit.

The Sri Lankan Roman Catholic Church has constructively contributed to maintaining the cohesion of the country's social fabric. The contribution of the Church in the fields of education, healthcare and social service over the years are well appreciated by the people of Sri Lanka. The significant contribution of the Church towards post- conflict reconstruction and financial assistance for the affected population to regain their lost livelihoods are particularly noted with gratitude. Earlier this year, Sri Lanka was given the opportunity to host the 6th General Assembly of the Asian Integral Pastoral Action (ASIPA) aimed at animating small Christian communities across the Continent.

Based on Sri Lanka's experience of terrorism and its impact on the lives of our people, my country is supportive of Your Holiness's efforts to promote world peace, disarmament and dialogue among civilizations. Having emerged from a three decade long terrorist conflict a little over 3 years ago, Sri Lanka's commitment towards peace, development and stability is particularly strong. The Government in July 2012 released its strategy for implementation of the recommendations of Sri Lanka's home grown national reconciliation mechanism – the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). Budgetary allocation for the implementation of LLRC recommendations have been included in the Budget 2013. Consistent with these plans in the former conflict affected areas, we have been able to close all Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Welfare Centres with those previously sheltered there moving back to their own homes, while a few live with family and friends ; 98% of the populated areas affected by landmines have

been cleared ; 94% of the former LTTE terrorist cadres that surrendered or were arrested at the end of the fighting, have been rehabilitated and released to their families ; the Security Forces presence in the Jaffna Peninsula has been reduced from 50,000 at the height of the conflict to a little over 15,000 at present; the Trilingual Policy announced by the Government in January 2012 to further expand the official languages Policy is being implemented vigorously; Sri Lanka's democratic credentials were yet again re-asserted with the successful conduct of Provincial Council elections, including in the previously conflict affected Eastern Province and elections in the Northern Province will follow as mandated by the Constitution; following on a GDP growth rate of 22% in 2010, the Northern Province in 2011 recorded a GDP growth rate of 27.1%, and continues to increase its share in the national economy driven by an expansion in agriculture, fishing, construction, transportation and financial services.

At the national level too, Sri Lanka is showing considerable economic resilience, notwithstanding the worsening global economic environment. Sustaining a momentum of over 8% for the first time in two consecutive years, Sri Lanka's economy grew by 8.3% in 2011, the highest in Sri Lanka's post independence history. Improved consumer and investor confidence arising from the peace dividend, favourable macroeconomic conditions, increased capacity utilization, expansion of infrastructure facilities and renewed economic activity in the Northern and Eastern Provinces have underpinned this growth. Inflation remained at single digit levels for the third consecutive year and unemployment declined to its lowest level of 4.2% in 2011, from 4.9% in 2010. In 2011 Sri Lanka's international trade also performed commendably with export income growing by 22%. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), including loans, grew by 107% to US\$ 1,066 million in 2011 from over US\$ 516 million in 2010. Tourist arrivals which grew by 30.8% in 2011 is expected to grow by around 40% this year, and it is envisaged that Sri Lanka would for the first time be hosting over one million tourists.

While confident that the continuance of these trends will enable Sri Lanka to reap the benefits of this era of peace, the Government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa is deeply committed to ensure equity, sustainability and socio-cultural development within Sri Lankan society. In this process we have placed much emphasis on the vital role of children and youth conscious that the advancement of younger generations is key in the country's post-conflict rebuilding and reconciliation. The Government is infusing more capital from the national budget to give a new lease of life to sectors such as education and health to ensure the well being and development of children and youth, in whose hands the future of the country lies. Skills development programmes have been put in place to ensure opportunities for decent jobs and guarantee better living standards, including for Sri Lanka's migrant work force that constitutes 17% of the working population. The government has also placed special emphasis on inter-religious dialogue as a means to further facilitate and strengthen the national reconciliation effort. In this context, Sri Lanka was privileged to host over 600 international representatives at the Inter-religious and Cultural International Conference on World Peace in November.

As Sri Lanka builds on a new era of peace, stability and equality, where the multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic dimension that the country is renowned takes primacy. My Government recognizes the pivotal role the religious leaders could play in this regard. The important contribution and dedication of the Roman Catholic Church towards inter-religious dialogue and socio-cultural development in Sri Lanka are widely recognized. In this context, the valuable services rendered by His Eminence Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith is particularly noteworthy. His Eminence has remained committed towards ongoing reconciliation endeavours

through his work, as the leader of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka is also appreciative of the contribution made towards this end by the Holy See through Your Holiness's Apostolic Nuncio in Colombo, and the generous donor assistance by Caritas International and its associated charities.

As Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, allow me also express Sri Lanka's appreciation to your Permanent Representative and delegation to the United Nations in Geneva with whom we remain closely engaged, for their active participation during Sri Lanka's recently concluded Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the recognition of the significant progress made by Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the conflict. The UPR provided Sri Lanka a useful opportunity to continue its engagement with the international community and the UN system, in an equitable and respectful manner and outline the future trajectory the country intends to take for the benefit of all sections of its people. I look forward to remaining engaged with the relevant Departments in the Vatican, particularly the Secretariat of State, as well as with your Representation in Geneva, to further consolidate bilateral relations.

Allow me to conclude, Your Holiness, by assuring you that I will endeavour to continue building upon the excellent relations that exist between Sri Lanka and the Holy See and offer my warmest wishes for your good health and personal well being.

Thank you.