



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

63rd Session of the Executive Committee
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Agenda Item 4 (General Debate)

Statement by

H.E. Ravinatha P. Aryasinha
Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka

(Geneva, 2nd October 2012)

Statement by H. E. Ravinatha P. Aryasinha, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the 63rd Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – 02 October 2012

At the outset Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka wishes to congratulate you for your able leadership, and welcomes the new members of the Executive Committee. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the High Commissioner for the Opening Statement which provided a detailed overview of the work undertaken and the challenges faced by the UNHCR over the past year. We also acknowledge the insightful remarks made by the Executive Director of the WFP in her Keynote Address.

Sri Lanka recognizes the important role played by the UNHCR in providing assistance and solutions to people the world over. Sri Lanka is particularly grateful to the UNHCR and its donors for the support extended during natural disasters such as the occasional floods, through the 2004 catastrophic Tsunami, to help mitigate the effects during the thirty-year-long terrorist conflict and in supporting the post-conflict resettlement programme, including through the provision of shelter grants and basic household items. We look forward to our continued engagement with the UNHCR even as Sri Lanka's operational environment has shifted from humanitarian relief, through early recovery, to full-fledged sustainable development.

In contrast to the considerable difficulty and gloom in the humanitarian crises that continue to engulf many parts of the world today, you would agree that Sri Lanka's achievements in post-conflict development, provides confidence and hope. These developments lend credence to the position that even the most severe and insurmountable of challenges could be overcome with the political commitment and dedication of the concerned country, and the requisite support provided by the international community.

As many in this audience will recall, in May 2009, as the terrorist conflict in Sri Lanka came to an end and the caring of nearly 300,000 IDPs became necessary, much fear was expressed in some quarters that malnutrition, disease and death would be rampant in the IDP villages; that the Government would not be interested in de-mining; that IDPs would be "incarcerated" indefinitely. The Government's intent regards the ex-LTTE combatants was questioned with the claim that "they would not be released and that their lives would be in danger". It was also said that the high security zones would not be disbanded; that the Government would not be able to undertake the massive investment that was needed to restore livelihoods and ensure

infrastructure development in the previously conflict-affected areas, and that no effort will be made towards post-conflict reconciliation.

Given this backdrop, the verifiable facts on the ground today have proven that these fears were misplaced:

- The socio-economic, nutritional and mortality indicators in Sri Lanka's IDP villages which at its peak 295,873 IDPs were deemed commendable by international standards, to that of a normal population of this magnitude. Access to education, health and recreational facilities were provided to children living in the welfare villages.
- With the resettlement of IDPs displaced at the end of the conflict over three years ago, the final IDP village 'Menik Farm' was closed down last week, and Sri Lanka remains committed to addressing the remaining challenges of the returnees, including some who still live with host families. The UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Subinay Nandy, has noted that 'The closure of the camp is a significant sign of the transition from conflict to sustainable peace and the commitment of the Government to resettling tens of thousands of people back to their homes'.
- The resettlement process has gone hand in hand with the demining and demilitarization of the former conflict-affected areas. Of the estimated 2,061.53 sq.km. contaminated with landmines and UXOs, less than 116 sq.km. remain to be cleared. It is noteworthy that 75% of the demining work has been carried out by the Sri Lanka Army.
- The former high security zones have ceased to exist, and the Security Forces presence in the Jaffna peninsula has been reduced from 50,000 at the height of the conflict, to 15,000 at present, and the military is no longer involved in civil administration in the Northern and Eastern provinces.
- Of the approximately 12,000 ex-LTTE combatants who surrendered or were arrested at the end of the conflict, 10,981 (which included 594 child combatants), have been rehabilitated and re-integrated with their families and society.
- With extensive government investment in infrastructure and livelihood development, the former conflict-affected Northern Province which recorded a growth rate of 22% in 2010, continued the trend recording a 27.1% growth rate in 2011, which was by far the highest growth rate among all provinces. The Northern Province has continued to

increase its share of the national economy driven by an expansion in agriculture, fishing, construction, transportation and financial services.

- Following the submission of the report of Sri Lanka's domestic reconciliation mechanism - the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in November 2011, the Government of Sri Lanka in July 2012 released its strategy for the implementation of the recommendations, under the direction of an 8-member Task Force headed by the Secretary to the President. 'Land return and resettlement' comprises, inter alia, an important sub-theme in this Action Plan, with resettlement already at an advanced stage of implementation.

Mr. Chairman, those who seek to downplay the significance of these achievements and constantly keep shifting goal posts, show disrespect not only to Sri Lanka and its international partners whose steadfast commitment to this task has made these achievements possible, but also to those who have at last emerged from the suffering caused by 30 years of terrorist conflict.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka remains ready to share its experience and best practices in post-conflict resettlement and rehabilitation with the international community. We also look forward to strengthening the ongoing cooperation between the UNHCR and member states.

I thank you.