
We are tired of hypocrisy and double dealing: Sri Lanka at UN Human Rights

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Intervention of Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, in the Interactive Dialogue on the Reports of Special Rapporteurs under Item 3 of the Agenda of the UN Human Rights Council

“Sri Lanka thanks the Special Rapporteurs who spoke this morning for their reports on two important areas. We still remember the visit of the Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion, and confirm that, as the only country in the world that has substantial proportions of its population belonging to four major religions of the world, we will continue to affirm pluralism and tolerance in this regard. The tragic occurrence yesterday at a mosque, where terrorism took the lives of people of different religions, shows that we need always to be on guard against forces that abhor the broadminded ecumenicalism that we strive to promote. With regard to the Report on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, we deplore a confusion that takes away from the very real dangers that could threaten such defenders. Though the Rapporteur did not refer to Sri Lanka in her presentation, the Report itself mentions Sri Lanka several times, and one of these instances was also the subject of an intervention by the Czech Republic. Significantly, this was the reference that seemed to us irrelevant, since it seems to privilege irresponsibility and a lack of transparency that we have found especially worrying in the context of inadequate safeguards against the funding of terrorism and terrorist related activities. Mr President, physical threats to anyone, including defenders of human rights, are to be deplored, and we believe the Rapporteur is right to draw our attention to possible lapses in this regard. But complaints about requirements with regard to registration and close monitoring of funding is essential, and we believe this Council should affirm the need for full accountability and transparency, for all public organizations, and in particular those that purport to sit in judgment on governments that are selected by and accountable to their peoples. Mr President, we in Sri Lanka have had to face bunkers and walls and swimming pools for terrorist leaders built with funds which the taxpayers of countries more fortunate than ourselves intended for the benefit of our people. We have found that NGOs profiting from the generosity of citizens of such countries, and also from UN funding, claim to have been engaged in advocacy but can show nothing positive for their millions. We are tired, Mr President, of hypocrisy and double dealing that take advantage of the humanism of world citizens. It is for this reason that we have asked for proper systems of accounting. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has agreed that there has been inadequate monitoring and coordination in the past, and has promised to improve the situation, but we need also to ensure accountability to the people of Sri Lanka with regard to money supposed to be expended on their behalf. Recently we found that an agency claiming to engage in advocacy, which engaged in propaganda against the government, claimed to have been funded by the Canadian and Australian governments, but the Australian government denied this. We are still awaiting clarification from Canada in this regard, and hope that at some stage responding to correspondence in this important particular will become regular practice. Unfortunately abuse of funding to attack government, which seems important to us, does not seem important to others, and in time this request for clarity too may be interpreted as an attack on defenders of human rights. Perhaps, Mr President, the mandate may need to be expanded in time, if the antics of non-State actors are to be treated with the seriousness they deserve, to deal also with defenders of States against secretly funded attacks in relation to Human Rights. Mr President, Sri Lanka will not compromise on the need for financial probity and accountability and we strongly recommend that this Council too request and require minimum standards of accountability and transparency from all those who pronounce here. I am sure that the distinguished delegate from the Czech Republic knows exactly how her stay here and the documents she produces are financed, and there should be similar openness about the funding of those who launch attacks so regularly on particular governments. Mr President, we have dealt previously with the questions of visits, which in principle we welcome, but they should be designed to improve the situation, as has happened with regard to mandates on Torture and Displaced Persons. Given however instances in which our attempts to engage were stymied, we are cautious about interventions that will not help. The Rapporteur had made requests to earlier governments, and we are happy that she renewed a couple of months ago a request last made in 2004. This may be considered in the light of her report, and in terms of the interactions which we hope will follow responses to the queries she has recently addressed to us.”