
A bridge between Sri Lanka and the World, a bridge between Sri Lanka's past and its future

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Sri Lanka's Ambassador Dayan Jayatilleka speaks at the recently concluded 11th special session of the UN Human Rights Council. The Resolution submitted by Sri Lanka and co-sponsors was adopted with a convincing majority of 29 for and 12 against with 6 abstaining. Transcript of the remarks introducing the Resolution "Thank you Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates. Resolution L.1 Rev.2 is not a hurrah for Sri Lanka. It is a sober, considered document which I see as a bridge, a bridge between Sri Lanka and the world, and a bridge between Sri Lanka's present and its future.

One can see just how carefully considered a text this is when you bear in mind that the original L.1 had seventeen paragraphs while Rev.2 has twenty nine. Why this expansion? And where did this expansion come from? Excellencies, the expansion in the text is a frank result of annexation, of incorporation, not in any aggressive manner but in the spirit of incorporating the concerns of all in this council, concerns that were in the Swiss text that was circulating and in a number of other texts that were presented to Sri Lanka. We have sought to represent the maximum possible consensus, we have sought to make this the highest not the lowest common denominator of the concerns of the council with regard to Sri Lanka. This is why we have the expanded version, which brought us from L.1 through Rev.1 to Rev.2. Click on the photo to listen the speech Click on the photo to listen to the speech I draw your attention, Excellencies, in particular, to Op. 10 which enshrines and embeds the entirety of the joint statement between the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, and the government of Sri Lanka. It reads, and I quote: "Welcomes the visit to Sri Lanka of the Secretary General of the United Nations at the invitation extended by the President of Sri Lanka and endorses the joint communiqué issued at the conclusion of the visit, as well as the understandings contained therein." I think there can be no more concrete a testimonial, Mr President, to the sincerity of Sri Lanka and the co-sponsors of this resolution, to the values we all share, universal human rights and to all the humanitarian concerns that were voiced during this discussion. Mr President, I referred to the text as a bridge and we know that bridges have a weight that they can bear. Any weight that is put on them beyond a certain point will cause the spans to collapse, and Sri Lanka and its co-sponsors do not want to see that happen. We are ten days after the conclusion of a thirty year war and we think that this text represents the best synthesis of the sentiments of the Human Rights Council. "Thank you Mr President. For a moment my hearing was malfunctioning. I thought that I heard you tell the delegate of Germany to turn off its megaphone, but I think you said microphone. I'm sorry I was absolutely confused. Mr President, Sri Lanka is saddened by the comments that have been made by certain delegations because these do not reflect the accuracy of the process that has taken place over the last several weeks. We here know that this Special session was canvassed for at least four weeks. It was canvassed on the basis that there was a humanitarian catastrophe of innocent civilians trapped in a cross-fire. That was the rationale for the search for sixteen signatures which took over three and a half weeks. Now that situation... The drive by the way, Mr President, was for a Special session on the 14th May. That situation has been transformed totally and radically; there are no more civilians trapped in the cross-fire, all the civilians have escaped LTTE custody. Therefore there is no underlying basis for this Special session with a general session, a Regular session just a few days away next week. What then is behind this call for a Special Session? It doesn't require decoding Mr President, Excellencies. It is very clear from the proceedings that started yesterday. From high officials who should be above the fray, making statements which presume guilt on the part of Sri Lanka, and which could lend itself to misperceptions of bias of one sort or the other, to Special Rapporteurs who clearly exceeded the code of conduct, to a handful of countries which kept on mentioning war crimes, war crimes and war crimes, over and over again, presuming guilt just one week after a thirty year war was over. Mr President, these are the same people who told the world that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, so I wouldn't buy a used car from these people, let alone allegations of war crimes. We tried but the people who are criticising us today, Mr President, didn't even bother to sit down and have a cup of coffee with the other countries in our region and ask them what they thought of the Sri Lanka situation and the call for a Special Session. So much for inclusivity, which is supposed to animate the behaviour of us all in the Human Rights Council. Mr President, L.1 Rev.2 is not a blank cheque for the government of Sri Lanka. It embeds the totality of the agreement between the Secretary General and the government of Sri Lanka. It is not a blank cheque. It does not give a green light to Sri Lanka to do everything and anything it wants, but it is not a punitive text either. It is not a manifesto for a lynch mob and this is its true value. Thank you, Mr President."