
Emphatic Victory for Sri Lanka at Human Rights Council endorses Government's Position

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In PDF Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights, Mahinda Samarasinghe, led Sri Lanka's delegation to a decisive victory at the 11th Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva on Wednesday (27). Sri Lanka's resolution received 29 affirmative votes at the 47-member Council with only 12 voting against and 6 countries abstaining. Towards the conclusion of the one-and-a-half-day session, Sri Lanka's delegation worked with member states to evolve a consensual document. Taking several positive suggestions into consideration, Sri Lanka's initial draft resolution, which was co-sponsored by 17 other member states, was enhanced and expanded before it was brought to the Council for adoption on Wednesday evening. At this point a group acting on behalf of the European Union and some other countries sought to move a further series of nine amendments to the Sri Lankan resolution.

The Delegation of Cuba emphasizing that the proposed changes would alter the tenor and intent of the consensual resolution, tabled a "no action motion" which was successful in forestalling further consideration of these amendments. Subsequently, the Sri Lankan resolution was voted on and carried by a clear majority of 17 member states. Another Resolution that was put forward by the Swiss Delegation on behalf of some other countries was not considered by the UNHRC. Accordingly calls for international investigations and international monitoring and reporting on Sri Lanka in the post-conflict scenario were rejected. Minister Samarasinghe set the tone for Sri Lanka's engagement with the Council in his opening remarks delivered on Tuesday (26) when he said: "we will continue to work with all our friends in the international community. We will continue to engage as we have done in the past consistently with all regional and cross regional groups in this council." He added that Sri Lanka: "will continue in our efforts to facilitate our bilateral and multilateral partners in complementing the efforts of the Government in the multi-pronged strategies that we will put into place in the post-conflict era." He stressed that it was therefore unnecessary to engage in "the naming and shaming game". The Minister reiterated that it was in this spirit that a broad based draft resolution has been co-sponsored by many countries including Sri Lanka which has even taken into account some of the constructive and practical suggestions made by some countries who were supportive of another resolution. The Minister noted, with deep appreciation the support of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Group and the Organization of The Islamic Conference (OIC) Group - two important cross-regional groups at the HRC - and in particular the support of the African Regional Group as well as some countries of the Latin American and Asian Groups for their unstinting support to Sri Lanka. The Resolution that was adopted by the UNHRC is titled "Assistance to Sri Lanka in the promotion and protection of human rights", and incorporates several significant aspects. It reaffirms Article 1 and 2 of the UN Charter incorporating the principle of non-interference in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of nation states. It welcomes the end of hostilities and the liberation of civilians held against their will in the conflict zone by the LTTE, it unequivocally endorses the programme of work of President Mahinda Rajapakse's Government relating to the care and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and it encourages the several positive steps initiated by the Government to rehabilitate ex-combatants, care for child soldiers recruited by the LTTE and ensure socio-economic renewal in previously conflict affected areas. The Resolution also welcomes the invitation by President Rajapakse to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and appreciates the joint communiqué agreed on with the Government of Sri Lanka at the conclusion of his visit. The resolution also acknowledges President Rajapakse's commitment to seek a political settlement of all outstanding issues via the implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment and reaffirms the Government's commitment to eradicating discrimination against minorities. It is appreciative of Sri Lanka's cooperation with the UN and other international partners and the granting of access as appropriate to humanitarian actors in Sri Lanka as well as the open engagement with high-level UN dignitaries. Finally the resolution calls upon the international community to support Sri Lanka's efforts in combating underdevelopment and poverty by increasing financial assistance to ensure the full realization of all human rights including economic, social and cultural rights. Dr Dayan Jayatilaka, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN at Geneva introducing the Resolution commended it to the Council's attention as a document which reflected a consensual approach among members and which sought to incorporate a variety of perspectives. Minister Samarasinghe was joined on the delegation by Mohan Peiris PC, the Attorney-General, Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Ambassador Dayan Jayatilaka and Dr Rohan Perera, Advisor to the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Disaster Management and Human Rights. Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights Colombo