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# GOSL is committed to implement a home-grown solution: Minister Samarasinghe at 11th Session of HRC

Tuesday, 02 June 2009

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Address by Hon Mahinda Samarasinghe MP Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights of the Government of Sri Lanka at the 11th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council Geneva, 2 June 2009 Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen; I take pleasure in addressing this august body for the second time in successive weeks, particularly at a point when my country &ndash; Sri Lanka &ndash; is going through a process of renewal and hope for the first time in decades.

Exactly 3 months ago, during the high-level segment of the 10th Session of this Council I said: &ldquo;we are able to finally see the light at the end of the long and dangerous tunnel through which we groped our way for more than two decades.&rdquo; Just two weeks ago, Mr President, we marched out of that tunnel into the bright light of a new era for Sri Lanka and all her people. Our President led our security forces and our people with courage and fortitude to victory over forces of violence, destruction and separatist terrorism. President Mahinda Rajapakse has impressed upon the people of Sri Lanka that this was no victory for one segment of the community over another. He emphasized that the winning of the war was a triumph of all the people of Sri Lanka irrespective of ethnicity, religious belief or linguistic background. Mr President, As we look forward to a new beginning as one united people in one undivided land we face many challenges. Resettlement of the displaced is our primary obligation. These internally displaced persons have undergone great suffering being driven before the conflict and being held as hostages by a increasingly desperate group of terrorists. When I addressed this Council in March we were confident that we would obtain mastery over the terrorists. Indeed we could have done so much sooner. However, Mr President, the reason that complete military dominance took a further two-and-a-half months was that our security forces were under strict instructions to avoid the loss of civilian life. Our Government had taken a principled stand to eschew the use of heavy weapons and aerial bombardment in the last remaining sliver of land unlawfully held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Had we done so, Mr President, the Sri Lankan nation would have been celebrating victory over terrorism months ago. Ultimately our forces won the day, albeit at the cost of heavy casualties among the ranks of ground troops due to being constrained to the use of only light weaponry. Time and again the LTTE used suicide bombers and gunfire to prevent the civilian hostages from seeking safety with the Sri Lankan troops. Yet the civilians, who experienced the bitter reality of being held in captivity as human shields at first hand, kept trying to escape. A vast majority of them did and are now under the care of the Government. Mr President, what needs to be acknowledged is that the government was successful, without a blood bath, in resolving the largest hostage situation the world has seen in recent times, thus liberating our people from the clutches of the LTTE. We will now work hard to give them the future they deserve. Mr President, it is these people who now form the ranks of the internally displaced persons who live in over 40 locations. We are acutely conscious that these are people who have gone through much and have the right to safety and security and the legitimate expectation of a return to normality. Moreover, Mr President, we are aware that these are our people &ndash; Sri Lankan - citizens with all the hopes, dreams and aspirations towards a better tomorrow for themselves and their children. It is this better future that the Government of President Mahinda Rajapakse is committed to assuring. Mr President, we are facing several challenges. Apart from the provision of humanitarian relief services to the IDPs in temporary accommodation facilities, de-mining, restoration of civil administration, infrastructure development, provision of a means of economic survival through livelihood development and ultimately the restoration of popular political institutions that will enable democratic decision making by the people through freely chosen representatives are some of the main tasks to be achieved. Allied with this are the rehabilitation of child combatants and the demobilization, disarming and reintegration of other ex-combatants throughout the country which are also high on the list of priorities along with psycho-social care and counselling. To sustain these initiatives we need to be on our guard against any attempts to revive and revitalize separatism, disunity and destabilization. The Government of Sri Lanka will continue with its efforts to weed out terrorists who have infiltrated the ranks of IDPs and the civilian population. Mr President, At a juncture when we were justifiably proud of our achievements in militarily overcoming terrorism, one week after hostilities ended, we were disappointed that a Special Session of this Council was convened to discuss the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Especially with the 11th Regular Session at hand, the Special Session was unnecessary. We were humbled by the expression of support for the Resolution co-sponsored by Sri Lanka and 17 other countries last Wednesday. Those member states who supported Sri Lanka&rsquo;s position, delivered a resounding message on behalf of the international community in recognizing that the primacy of the principles embodied in Articles 1 and 2 of the United Nations Charter and in requesting the larger world community to assist Sri Lanka in its efforts to recover from decades of conflict. Those who co-sponsored and supported the Sri Lankan Resolution also demonstrated a resolve to assist countries such as Sri Lanka. Mr. President, moving on&hellip;, referring to the people in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, our President in his address to the Sri Lankan Parliament on 19 May, said: &ldquo;It is necessary that we give to these people the freedoms that are the right of people in all others parts of our country. Similarly, it is necessary that the political solutions they need should be brought to closer to them faster than any country or government in the world would bring. However, it cannot be an imported solution. We do not have the time to be experimenting with the solutions suggested by other countries. Therefore, it is necessary that we find a solution that is our very own, of our own nation. It should be a solution acceptable to all sections of the people. We expect cooperation for [that solution] from the international community and not obstruction. Should the international community doubt our capability to find such a solution, when we have successfully overcome a challenge that that the world was unable to achieve? No. We can achieve this.&rdquo; I am here to convey, through you Mr President, to the members of the Council and the rest of the community of nations, that this expression of confidence by President Mahinda Rajapakse exemplifies

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the determination of his Government to secure all the rights and freedoms of all the people of Sri Lanka. As the President of Sri Lanka rightly said, the Government of Sri Lanka is committed to implement a home-grown solution through the political process that have already commenced, while giving priority to immediate concerns we have in our hand. The Government will also initiate a reconciliation scheme, taking into account all the issues that need to be addressed, as well as national and regional ethos when we address them. Our efforts, if they are to be successful, must be complemented by the efforts of the friends of Sri Lanka, especially the United Nations and humanitarian agencies. We have put in place an overarching framework to guide the process of reconstruction, resettlement and socio-economic renewal under the "Northern Spring" programme put in place by President Rajapakse. I call upon the many friends and partners of Sri Lanka who have displayed a keen interest in our country and her people to come forward and work with us to achieve our common aims. We have already made gains in caring for those affected by the conflict. We are working towards incremental realization and maintenance of international standards in the provision of humanitarian assistance. Our ongoing engagement with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and several senior officials and representatives of the UN system has, apart from demonstrating our openness and willingness to work with our international partners, highlighted key areas of concern which we are confident of addressing together. Mr President, permit me to briefly touch upon two significant developments in Sri Lanka which will be of interest to members of this august body. Consequent to the successful conclusion of the humanitarian operations in the North and the liberation of the entire country and her people from terrorism, the Government is taking several initiatives to fast-track post-war peace building and development processes. Among these measures is an initiative by my Ministry to develop a National Framework proposal for the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life. Following a national sensitization workshop held in Colombo in late March, five working groups focusing on disarmament and demobilization, rehabilitation, reinsertion, social reintegration, and economic reintegration have been established to develop the respective components of the proposed National Framework. The working groups are made up of senior Government officials, policymakers, members of the armed forces, UN agencies and other relevant stakeholders. This is a key part of the Government's commitment to fostering reconciliation and development through the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive reintegration programme, which is an essential element for sustainable peace. The envisioned policy intervention will facilitate the reintegration of large numbers of ex-combatants by improving their employability in civilian occupations, minimizing their risk of socio-economic marginalization and ensuring a smooth transition from their military affiliations into their larger communities. Technical and financial assistance for this endeavour is being provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which is contributing its extensive international experience in the development and implementation of socio-economic reintegration programmes for conflict affected groups in Sri Lanka. It is anticipated that the proposal will be ready by end June, and national consultations will be held in July to endorse the draft framework. In the field of human rights promotion and protection, we are working on the development of a national action plan for the promotion and protection of human rights along the lines envisaged by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993. The substantive content of the plan, Mr President, was derived from our engagement with the Human Rights Council last May when we participated in the Universal Periodic Review Process and also our interactions with Special Procedures and Mechanisms of the UN. The recommendations accepted, the voluntary pledges made by Sri Lanka at the UPR and the several conclusions of experts, rapporteurs and special representatives as well UN Treaty Bodies have all been collated, categorized and prioritized in keeping with national imperatives. I have just recently authorized the setting up of eight expert groups on specific thematic areas which will finalize the draft national action plan. The thematic areas are torture, civil and political rights, economic social and cultural rights, labour rights, migrant workers' rights, women, children and internally displaced persons. The expert groups will draw on expertise from academia, the public sector, professional and private sectors and civil society. I must express my gratitude to the UN Country Team and to the United Nations Development Programme for their strong support in complementing our initiative. I am certain that we will be able to report impressive progress when we participate in the second cycle of the UPR process in the next three years. Mr President, In conclusion, I wish to thank you for your leadership and sagacity and the members of this Council for their sustained interest in Sri Lanka. I also wish to acknowledge the encouragement and support received from the regional and cross-regional groups for their cooperation and interest in Sri Lanka. I assure you that Sri Lanka will continue to engage with members of this Council in a spirit of constructive dialogue and cooperation. Mr President, Since this is the last regular session of this Council being conducted under your stewardship, let me take this opportunity to pay my sincere gratitude for the unwavering commitment and leadership you have shown during the last one year in guiding this august body in the promotion and protection of human rights all over the world. My delegation joins me in wishing you the best in your future endeavours and we look forward to working with you and your great country in the further promotion and protection of human rights. Thank you very much Mr President.