Sri Lanka responds to NGOs on Civil and Political Rights

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Right of reply exercised by Prof Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights to issues raised under Item 3 of the Agenda of the Human Rights Council: Civil, political, economic, social, cultural rights and right to development Sri Lanka is disturbed by the intervention of a single Non-Governmental Organization that detracted from the generally high standard of debate under this Item in pursuing its relentless vendetta against the Sri Lankan state. In the present context of seeking reconciliation however it seems best not to respond in kind, but instead to discuss in this context some of the contextual issues raised by some countries.

In particular Mr President we need to consider the issue of Freedom of Expression, which we all see as one of the most important Rights we should encourage and protect. We were struck by the presentation of the distinguished representative from Norway, who noted its importance but commented that this freedom had to be limited in the case of incitements to hatred. Unfortunately what constitutes such incitement is not easy to distinguish. We also need to consider the impact of freedom of expression when exercised without responsibility. Some time back we were astonished when International Educational Development Inc made a passionate defence of the use of children over 14 in combat. Such statements could be defended in terms of the right to freedom of expression, but when such wicked ideas are translated into practice it is the vulnerable who suffer. Thus we found it deeply depressing that those members of the international community functioning in areas controlled by terrorists kept quiet about the fact that the Tigers recruited first one, and then even a second, member of each family. But it would seem that the ruthlessness of terrorists was enough of a barrier then to the free expression that might have saved children, whilst conversely those who advocated child recruitment could propagate their wicked ways even in this august assembly. Conversely, whilst upholding the right to free expression, we should be careful about encouraging downright falsehoods. Sadly the historic basis of European morality, the Ten Commandments, now seems to have gone by the board. Despite the experience of the horror of witch hunts, the bearing of false witness seems to be positively encouraged, especially against those who seem distant or easily othered. Perhaps nothing can be done about those who actually tell lies for partisan purposes. But it is regrettable that such utterances are taken up and propagated by those who should be more circumspect. We request then that support for freedom of expression should not lead to support for utterances that promote hatred and enmity, without attention to questions of evidence or credibility.