UN should not interfere in the internal affairs of States - Prime Minister at UN General Assembly

Monday, 28 September 2009
Last Updated Monday, 28 September 2009

"Multilateralism is not about the UN agenda responding only to the demands of a minority of powerful States, but also defending the interest of the powerless majority. It is also imperative that the prohibition reflected in the Article 2 (7) of the Charter that the UN should not interfere in the internal affairs of States be respected," said Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake addressing the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York (Sept. 26).
Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake said: "Today, we have entered a forward-looking, post-conflict phase, recognizing at the same time the urgent need to deal with the scars and unresolved challenges of the past. In our unique victory in defeating terrorism, we are grateful for the assistance, encouragement and co-operation extended to us by friendly countries; and we seek similar understanding in making a steady and stable transition from ending conflict to ensuring lasting peace and security". Sri Lanka is committed to complying with its international obligations in the field of human rights and humanitarian standards. Sri Lanka will undertake further domestic measures aimed at reconciliation and in the light of lessons learnt. In less than three months after the conflict, in August 2009, we have made significant progress, he said. Address by Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake at the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York on September 26, 2009 Mr. President, I have great pleasure in congratulating you, Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, on your assumption of the Chair of the 64th Session of the General Assembly. Sri Lanka will extend its fullest co-operation to you in effectively concluding the work before us. Mr. President, Significant developments have taken place in Sri Lanka since my President Mahinda Rajapaksa addressed the 63rd Session of the General Assembly last year. This year I take the floor with renewed hope and optimism for my country. In May this year, Sri Lanka was successful in defeating the scourge of brutal terrorism after almost three decades of conflict inflicted on us by the LTTE, one of the most ruthless terrorist organizations known to the international community. Our recent anti terrorist operations cost us only 2.8 Billion Dollars in all, compared with other anti-terrorist operations elsewhere which are costing much more. In an age when the international community has collectively acknowledged that terrorism threatens the very foundations of global and national security, our success in defeating terrorism will benefit not only the people of Sri Lanka, but all our peace-loving partners in the international community.

Mr. President, Today, we have entered a forward-looking, post-conflict phase, recognizing at the same time the urgent need to deal with the scars and unresolved challenges of the past. In our unique victory in defeating terrorism, we are grateful for the assistance, encouragement and co-operation extended to us by friendly countries; and we seek similar understanding in making a steady and stable transition from ending conflict to ensuring lasting peace and security. We have shared our hopes and concerns with the United Nations. At the end of the conflict and at the invitation of my President - Mahinda Rajapaksa, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon was the first, high-level dignitary to visit Sri Lanka. Mr. President, With the defeat of the LTTE in May this year, approximately 290,000 civilians in the Vanni region were liberated from the decades - long hold of the LTTE. One of our highest priorities thereafter has been to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of these displaced civilians, and to ensure their long-term safe, voluntary and dignified return to their homes. The welfare of our people at present in temporary transit sites must keep up with standards that meet our own high expectations as well as accepted international norms. This task has been facilitated by the assistance we receive from UN agencies, international and local civil society partners and donors. A total in excess of 54 agencies are actively engaged with us in these welfare villages. In addition to providing food and transitional shelter, these welfare villages are equipped with facilities such as schools, banks, post offices, and health-care centres to meet the needs of the displaced civilians. In fact, children who had been denied their education by the LTTE, are now for the first time learning to read and write in these sites. Mr. President, The Government reiterates its firm resolves to resettle the IDPs expeditiously, in co-operation with our international partners. In this regard, we have learnt valuable lessons from our own past experiences.

Both in the post-tsunami context, and in the successful resettlement programmes in the East of the country completed in the last two years, we realized that the pace of resettlement must not be forced if it is to be truly safe and sustainable in the long term. For example, against all established humanitarian norms, the LTTE had indiscriminately scattered landmines and other explosives in all areas of civilian habitation in the North. The time-consuming and meticulous process of demining is now underway. From another perspective, the stability and security that we have restored at great human cost cannot, and must not be compromised, particularly, when a large number of self-confessed ex-LTTE cadres continue to mix with the IDPs. Mr. President, In the aftermath of conflict, peace cannot last without reconciliation. We have put in place a broad and comprehensive foundation for long term peace and security encompassing reconstruction, development, political empowerment and reconciliation. Sri Lanka is committed to complying with its international obligations in the field of human rights and humanitarian standards. Sri Lanka will undertake further domestic measures aimed at reconciliation and in the light of lessons learnt. In less than three months after the conflict, in August 2009, we have made significant progress. For the first time in over a decade, Local Government elections were held in the North completely free of any violence and intimidation. In all areas where the LTTE had suppressed all dissent in the past, democracy will be restored and electoral processes will be re-established, encouraging a local leadership to emerge. Mr. President, We must enable those scarred by the conflict to lead productive lives, and resume their roles as neighbours and productive citizens. Children were forced into combat by the LTTE’s abhorrent practice of using children as fighting cadres.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has personally launched a national campaign to “Bring Back the Child” and an extensive rehabilitation programme is underway to provide new beginnings for former child combatants. In co-operation with UN agencies and donors, we have put in place a National Framework for the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants. Mr. President, With the end of conflict, and for the first time in many decades, Sri Lanka is poised to harness the full human, political and economic potential of the country for the betterment of our people. Donors, international organizations and financial institutions are expressing their confidence in our reconstruction and development plans by making important contributions. After a lapse of many years, the Eastern Province has already begun to contribute to the national economy, under the Eastern Re-awakening Programme. The Waddakin Wasantham Programme was initiated by President Rajapaksa this year to establish a strong and modern economy in the Northern Province. Civilian lives are being normalized with the restoration of former livelihoods such as farming and fisheries. Already people and produce from the North and the East of the country are being transported along previously inaccessible road and rail networks facilitating people-to-people contacts, and integrating the economy of the north with the rest of the country. Police stations, courts, schools and infrastructure are being re-established. Mr. President, The end of conflict provides us with a historic opportunity to address the grievances and aspirations of all communities, in expediting a long-term political solution. Under the All Party Representative Committee process, the Government is looking forward with a great degree of confidence to obtaining consensus among all sections of the political spectrum on the proposals envisaged in this regard. The solution that evolves through this process, and which we will offer to all communities must be a home-grown product. Complimentary to the long-term political solution envisaged through the APRC process, an All Party Committee of Development and Reconciliation has been initiated by President Rajapaksa. The forum reflects the Government’s commitment to a pluralistic and inclusive approach in addressing post-conflict challenges. Mr. President, The theme of this year’s debate is “effective responses to global crises – strengthening multilateralism and dialogue among civilizations for international peace, security and development”.

The multilateral architecture of the United Nations was created 64 years ago to provide a collective response to global issues to achieve the objective of peace, security and development. As a result of a multitude of factors, including the accelerated globalization of recent decades, the challenges we are confronted with today are complex and inter-twined, and require a holistic, concerted and collective approach. An individual State alone cannot meet these challenges. Thus, multilateralism must be strengthened to meet contemporary global crises, such as terrorism, the global financial crisis, the adverse consequences of climate change, food and energy security as well as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We need to take necessary measures to ensure that the impact of globalization is fair, inclusive and sustainable. Multilateralism is not about the UN agenda responding only to the demands of a minority of powerful States, but also defending the interest of the powerless majority. It is also imperative that the prohibition reflected in the Article 2 (7) of the Charter that the UN should not interfere in the internal affairs of States be respected. The Charter must be our guiding norm since it is the Charter that keeps us together. Non interference in the Internal affairs of states must be respected at all times. Mr. President, In our own region, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, SAARC, which Sri Lanka chairs at present, has lent its voice to several issues of global importance affecting our region. Among them, terrorism, the impact of the global economic crisis, climate change as well as food security are of prime concern to the one-fifth of humanity living in SAARC nations. We in the SAARC region will continue to work in every international forum, including the UN, to find regional as well as global solutions that can deal with these issues in an equitable manner.
Mr. President, A global problem such as terrorism with its transnational linkages requires an effective and compelling global response. As our own experience in Sri Lanka has shown, the transnational character of criminal activities of terrorist groups such as the LTTE, required that counter-terrorism operations meticulously carried out in the battle field, be supported by concerted and well-coordinated measures of international cooperation directed against the multifaceted criminal networks of the terrorist organizations. We are aware that much of the financial sustenance for the destruction caused in Sri Lanka by the LTTE came from sources overseas, particularly deep rooted networks in developed countries. The so-called overseas representatives of the LTTE and their front organizations, procured funds and arms through a complex range of criminal activities ranging from terrorist financing, money laundering, arms procurement, illicit trade and other organized criminal activities such as drug trafficking and human trafficking, all of which are inter-related. The remnants of the fast-diminishing LTTE networks overseas continue these efforts to date. Although we have been successful in defeating terrorism in Sri Lanka, we continue to urge our friends and partners in the international community to be vigilant, and to continue to take action against the illegal acts of the LTTE in their soil. We are well aware that some of these front organizations exploit noble humanitarian sentiments and masquerade in the guise of humanitarian NGO's or even infiltrate them. We thank our partners in the international community who have taken action to expose these. The threat posed to maritime security through the transportation of large consignments of sophisticated equipment and lethal cargo to provide logistical support to terrorist groups requires our urgent attention. In recent years Sri Lanka has experienced the most unprecedented and dangerous forms of maritime terrorism. Our Navy has successfully confronted and interdicted the movement of virtual floating warehouses of arms and ammunition, which posed a grave threat to the security and stability of our nation and to our region. At the global level, this phenomenon calls for a revision of existing laws pertaining to boarding and search of vessels in the high seas. We need a comprehensive legal framework to address all aspects of safety and security of maritime navigation, going beyond the current concerns on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). This would make a distinct contribution to securing global peace and security.
The comprehensive range of these terrorist activities and their disastrous impact on the security and stability of States

should awaken all States to consider, very seriously and as a matter of urgency, the importance of forging a global consensus on a comprehensive normative framework for international cooperation and solidarity in combating terrorism, within the parameters of international law. It is in this context that I wish to emphasize the urgent need to finalize the ongoing negotiations on the Draft Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism. The time has come to reach finality on the outstanding issues and through the exertion of the necessary political will, to adopt this Convention without further delay. Sri Lanka as Chairman of the UN Ad-Hoc Committee on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism remains committed to do its utmost to reach consensus on the Draft Comprehensive Convention and Sri Lanka looks forward to the fullest support of all Member States in this important task. Mr. President, Today, we face the greatest challenge to the world economy in modern times. The global financial and economic crisis, which had its roots in the developed countries, will have a long-term impact on human lives in developing countries. Through the pursuit of prudent policies, Sri Lanka has been able to minimize the impact of the crisis on the domestic financial system, and maintain an overall positive rate of growth through the midst of the crisis. Recovery from the crisis should go well beyond restoring the stability of the economies of the developed countries, and must address the deeper development crisis which ensued in developing countries. The Plan of Action adopted at the UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis urgently needs to be implemented with the support of the International Financial Institutions and advanced economies. The global financial and economic crisis also highlights the need for transparent multilateral regulatory structures at the helm of the world economy. Mr. President, The Millennium Declaration set 2015 as the target date for achieving the MDGs and we are already nearing the target date. Long before the MDGs were articulated globally, Sri Lanka was well on track to reach the related targets in several areas. Development as it is understood today and as embodied in the Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs) and MDGs encompass objectives related to human well-being, including freedom, empowerment, distribution patterns and environmental sustainability. This broad dimension is aligned with Sri Lanka’s pluralistic democratic traditions, and Sri Lanka was early among developing countries to understand the importance of investing in human resources, gender equality and social development. We are determined to make further progress. We welcome the High-Level Meeting to be convened by the Secretary General next year. Mr. President, As a developing island State, Sri Lanka is highly vulnerable to the adverse impact of Climate Change caused by unsustainable production and consumption patterns of industrialized countries. The “carbon debt” that is owed to us by the developed countries must be used to finance the financial and technological assistance that we need in order to adapt our industries to a sustainable path. As a developing country, our people naturally aspire to achieve progress and higher living standards. We hope that we can reach an agreed outcome at the Copenhagen Conference, in accordance with the principle of common, but differentiated responsibilities.

Mr. President, The reform of the United Nations and the UN Security Council must be a high priority. My delegation believes that the objective of the reform process should be to strengthen multilateralism and to promote greater democracy, transparency, effectiveness and accountability within a more democratic United Nations system. And in tandem we need to take measures to pursue the four pillars that are fundamental to our future as enunciated by President Obama.

Mr. President, My delegation believes that the United Nations and particularly this Assembly has the primary responsibility as set out in the Charter in the maintenance of international peace and security. In this context, the numerous unresolved conflicts around the world continue to remain a matter of concern. We are disappointed that little progress has been made in the implementation of Resolutions of this Assembly regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to Statehood and the realization of the two-State solution whereby Israel and Palestine could live side by side in peace and harmony. A just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including through practical recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, has been a matter closely advocated by President Mahinda Rajapaksa. In this regard, we are encouraged by the words spoken by President Obama in his address to this Forum.

Mr. President, You are presiding over this Assembly during a critical time. As Member States, we must mobilize the political will to shed our differences and work in a spirit of co-operation to respond effectively and swiftly to the challenges that confront us. I reiterate my delegations confidence in your leadership in this endeavour. Thank you.Courtesy: priu.gov.lk