
Professor Wijesinha makes an unexpected exception for Amnesty International

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In an unanticipated and impromptu right of reply at the Human Rights Council, Professor Rajiva Wijesinha pointed out that Amnesty International was part of the 'band wagon', that is now being built up. Recalling that Sri Lanka does not usually reply within the Council to nongovernmental organizations, Professor Wijesinha, said that he believed that a special exception needed to be made for Amnesty. Dissecting the Amnesty International Report which was launched yesterday, Professor Wijesinha revealed that the cases dealt with in the Report were from an earlier period and did not justify the hype with which it was presented, suggesting that the situation in Sri Lanka is 'really appalling'. Drawing from an earlier example of a report by Human Rights Watch, Professor Wijesinha drew attention to the subtle inconsistencies, and exaggerations incorporated into such reports. Referring to efforts by the Asia Pacific Centre for Human Rights Commissions and the UN system to strengthen the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, the Professor expressed his regret that the Commission was not assisted, due to a suppression of the UN contracted report, which suggested such assistance. In conclusion, Professor Wijesinha affirmed that 'the suggestion that we haven't done anything in the past is complete nonsense', and added that there was a need to better publicize these efforts. He ended by establishing that he hoped that the country would be able to show the Council and the world, that our approach to reconciliation, is a model. Text of full intervention:

Intervention of Professor Rajiva Wijesinha In exercising the right of reply to a statement made by Amnesty International Mr Chair, Sri Lanka does not ordinarily reply to Nongovernmental organizations at the present juncture, given the plethora of allegations made against us. But I believe that we need to make a special exception for Amnesty international, not least because I was greeted on arriving into this distinguished hall today, by the representative from Amnesty who gave me the statement, and I think that a reply might help them as well. I think it important, because yesterday Amnesty also released a report on various allegations, that again was part of what I might call a band wagon, that is now being built up. But the really sad thing about that report, which I went through carefully yesterday, to answer some journalist on my way to the airport, was that it dealt with a lot of very old cases and did not seem to justify the hype with which it was presented, suggesting that the situation in Sri Lanka is really appalling now. I think we need to go back to that Report very carefully. It is reminiscent of a report by Human Rights Watch which said that the Sri Lanka army had engaged in indiscriminate attacks on civilians, but on reading the whole report there was one case only, which was cited and in that, the army had acknowledged that the attack which was unfortunate, was through mortar locating radar, the LTTE at the time having brought in very heavy weaponry into a refugee centre. Looking through the statement that was issued by Amnesty, which I gather was different from that which was actually presented, I think the main point it suggests is that we are trying to do nothing and that, is completely wrong. I'm happy to say that just yesterday in Sri Lanka, I was delighted, that the UN system and the Asia Pacific Centre for Human Rights Commissions is working to strengthen our Human Rights Commission, in accordance with the National Action Plan on human rights. We regretted that for about 3 years, the Human Rights Commission was not assisted, because the Report suggesting such assistance, was suppressed in the Office of the High Commissioner in Geneva. I found that people here had not even seen that very positive Report that was issued by someone contracted by the UN. But now I think we are moving quite well on the National Human Rights Action plan, but it will take some time. On the issue of reconciliation I hope this chamber will take cognizance of the National Policy on Reconciliation, that has been prepared in my office with consultation of civil society as well as all the parties, and which we hope to implement very soon. I think the suggestion that we haven't done anything in the past is complete nonsense, but I think we need to publicize this better and hope that we will be able to show this chamber, and indeed the world, that we have a model, in our approach, to reconciliation. Thank you Mr Chair.