Ambassador Kunanayakam unanimously re-elected as Chairperson/Rapporteur of the UN HRC WG on the R2D

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Only one week after her return from the 13th Session of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XIII) in Doha, where she was elected by acclamation as an Asian Vice-Chair of the Conference and member of the Bureau, Sri Lanka’s Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, Ambassador Tamara Kunanayakam, was unanimously re-elected, also by acclamation, and in the presence of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, for a second term as Chairperson/Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on the Right to Development. The Working Group, which opened its 13th Session today in Geneva, is composed of all UN member States, including also Political Groups (NAM, OIC, EU, African Union) and Regional Groups (Africa, Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, Western Group, and Eastern Europe) represented in the United Nations. First elected to that position in 2011, barely one month after assuming her duties in Geneva, Ambassador Kunanayakam was again nominated by the Non-Aligned Movement, which had played a crucial role in drafting of the Declaration on the Right to Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1986, but which has not been implemented due to resistance from the West. In her opening statement today, Ambassador Kunanayakam thanked the delegates “for the trust and confidence placed in her” and expressed “the hope that the 25th anniversary of the Declaration commemorated last year, will provide inspiration to move forward, confront and eliminate the obstacles to its implementation, translate into concrete action the commitments undertaken, and enable the realization of the inalienable right to development of all peoples, both in their individual capacity and in their collective expression, as nations and States.” At the current session, scheduled to take place from 7th – 11th May, the Working Group will engage in drafting criteria and operational sub-criteria for monitoring the implementation of the Declaration on the Right to Development. The Non-Aligned Movement is committed to the drafting of an international instrument on the right to development, of a legally binding nature, a move that is opposed by the Western group of countries. The UN Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986 has its basis in the decolonization debate of the 50s and 60s that resulted in the call for the establishment of a new international economic order in which the newly independent States could guarantee their newly won political independence with economic independence. The Declaration is seen as a revolutionary document in that it challenges externally-driven growth-oriented development strategies, which had failed to bring about development for all. It defines development as a multidimensional process in which the human person, individually and collectively, is the subject not object of development. The realization of the collective right of peoples to self-determination is, therefore, a pre-condition for the realization of all other human rights. The responsibility of States to cooperate in eliminating the international obstacles to development that this implies is fiercely resisted by the West, which controls the international financial and trade institutions. The Declaration categorically rejects externally imposed models of development and champions the right of all peoples to shape their own destiny, without any external interference or intervention, or threats of intervention, whether in the form of conditionalities, sanctions, embargoes, or military aggression. UNCTAD XIII, Doha At UNCTAD XIII in Doha, Ambassador Kunanayakam represented the Asia region on the Bureau of the Conference, along with Bangladesh, China, Iran, Maldives, Pakistan, and Yemen, where they joined other members of the Group of 77 & China, representing developing countries, in ensuring that their interests were reflected in the deliberations and in the outcome document, the Doha Mandate. This quadrennial Conference is the highest decision making body of UNCTAD, where the 194 member States assess current trade & development issues, discuss policy options and formulate global policy responses, and also set the organization’s mandate and work priorities. The Conference allows for inter-governmental consensus building on the state of the world economy and development policies, and further identifies and defines the role of the United Nations & UNCTAD in addressing economic development problems. UNCTAD, which has come under attack by the industrialized West voicing discontent with its policy-advice to developing countries, has over the years provided an analysis of global macro-economic issues from a development perspective, often posing a challenge to the views of international institutions controlled by the West. Heated negotiations on the need to address the impact on developing countries of external factors such as the unilateral trade measures such as conditionalities, sanctions, and embargoes, the world financial crisis, foreign debt, and the international financial and monetary system, transfer of technology, control over intellectual property, climate change, the situation in Palestine, were among developing country concerns that threatened to block consensus in Doha, with accusations that the Western group was seeking to dismantle UNCTAD, as yet another effort to undermine the multilateral system. A breakthrough was achieved only in the early hours of the morning of the final day of the Conference with developing countries adopting the Doha Mandate preventing a roll-back of the 2008 Accra Accord adopted at UNCTAD’s 12th Session, ensuring that UNCTAD could continue to function on that basis, while also making it possible for the Secretariat to address new issues of serious concern to developing countries, such as the global financial crisis. Specialized in international trade and finance, Ambassador Kunanayakam has extensive knowledge of the UN System and multilateralism. She has worked in UNDP, ILO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, where she was Secretary of the Commission on Human Rights Working Group on the Right to Development, and also held responsibilities for Commission mandates on economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. She has published several publications on international finance and trade, and on national sovereignty issues. Her recent book on development and international cooperation was published in French under the title ‘Quel de veloppement ? Quelle coope ration internationale?, by the publisher on North South relations, Europe - Third World Center (CETIM). The book has gained prominence within the right to development discourse, with its increased use in political and academic circles. Geneva, 7th May 2012