



Statement made by Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights at the UN Human Rights Council Special Session on Sri Lanka on 26 May 2009 in Geneva

Excellencies, Friends,

We are focusing on Sri Lanka at a time when the 30 year conflict which has affected our country so negatively has come to an end.

Mr. President, I heard a little while ago from the previous speaker about conflict zones and been given access to conflict zones when the conflict has ended. There is absolutely no issue in terms of giving access. To our partners we have given access and we will continue to give access to complement Government efforts in looking after the needy.

Mr. President, when terrorism, the most extremist of its kind has been successfully eradicated we are once again focusing on Sri Lanka at a special Session today. Mr. President when the biggest hostage situation the world had ever seen in recent times has been successfully resolved and at a time when new challenges confront in our quest for durable and sustainable peace, we are meeting in this room and focusing on Sri Lanka in order to agree on a way forward. Unfortunately Mr. President I did not hear the High Commissioner in her statement referring the fact that one of the most ruthless terrorist organizations that the world has ever known has been eradicated; the fact that the 30 year old conflict has come to an end and we are in the process of addressing economic issues, social issues and political expectations; the fact that the biggest hostage crisis as I mentioned earlier the world has seen in modern times has been successfully resolved. This is the context in which we would like our friends in this room to understand and appreciate the challenges that we are facing as a nation who has come out of this 30 year conflict.

Mr. President, over 250,000 of our citizens who were held hostage by the LTTE in the north were rescued by our forces and are being looked after and cared for as we speak. There was a reference little while ago about lack of food; there was a reference little while ago about starvation, about malnutrition which is furthest from the truth. Today we have all of the UN agencies working side by side with governmental officials in each and every one of these camps. Today we have given access to 52 International Non Governmental Organizations and other non governmental organizations to work side by side with government officials in complementing efforts of the Government. My Ministry Mr. President enjoys a mandate on the protection side of the Government. I have not heard from any one of the UN Agencies, any one of these INGOs or NGOs telling us that there are people dying of malnourishment, of starvation and there is lack of food. So I would like Mr. President, to state for the record that 250,000 of our citizens are being looked after and cared for as we speak and we will continue to show that commitment and we will continue to offer access and facilitate our partners in the international community to complement efforts of the Government within a national frame work.

Mr. President, our objective of course is to resettle all our citizens in their homes in the shortest possible time. This is a decision that the people themselves must take. What we have to do is to ensure that the environment is created, conducive, so that an informed choice can be made by the people themselves whether they want to go back to their homes or not. And until such time that that informed decision is made we are committed to looking after our people ensuring their wellbeing and ensuring that we facilitate our friends in the international community to complement efforts of the Government.

Now Mr. President, nearly 9,000 surrenderees and other identified recruits of the LTTE will be put through a comprehensive rehabilitation programme addressing their special needs including increasing their employability so that reintegration into society is made much easier. Mr. President we work very closely with several UN Organisations such as UNDP, UNICEF and ILO as well as international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration, IOM in this endeavour. My Ministry has taken the initiative of preparing a national framework for the reintegration of ex-combatants and this is not an initiative that we started after the war was over, after the conflict was over, we were preparing for the post conflict era even before the LTTE was completely eliminated. So this is the type of commitment Mr. President, that we have shown as a Government and we will continue to show that commitment on behalf of our people.

Mr. President with the eradication of terrorism as we have known it to be we are conscious of new challenges before us. The task of de-mining, infrastructure rehabilitation, and restoration of basic services need to be put in place before resettlement can commence and then livelihood strategies to ensure that post re-settlement sustainability is ensured. There is no question of taking short cuts and subjecting ourselves to pressures from certain quarters and saying that we are sick and tired of these pressures; we are going to take these people back to their homes. It is not so easy, these are once again our people, these are Sri Lankan citizens and I dare say that we care for them more than anyone else and we are not going to take short cuts, we are going to ensure that the de-mining is done, we are going to ensure that the infrastructure is put into place, we are going to ensure that the basic services are provided and then all this information will be placed at the disposal of the people themselves who can then take a decision whether they want to go back or not. And once they go back Mr. President, their livelihood challenges will be also met, ensuring that they get back to on their own two feet.

Mr. President the government has right through out this difficult phase of liberating our people from terrorism never subscribed to the concept of a military solution as a final solution. We have always said that the only durable and lasting solution is a political process which addresses the socio, economic and political grievances and expectations of our citizens through a home grown process acceptable to all sections of our multicultural society. The efforts in this direction Mr. President have already commenced.

Mr. President we see another important challenge and that is, to reach out to the Tamil Diaspora living in countries of some of our friends in this room. So that by way of a process of dialogue and confidence building we can embark on our own reunification process and reconciliation process vital to ensuring never a repetition of what we as a nation had to go through Mr. President.

Mr. President we will continue to work with all our friends in the international community. We will continue to engage as we have done in the past consistently with all regional and cross regional groups in this council. I am sure that the Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives in this room will bear testimony to the fact that I have personally every occasion when I have been in Geneva taken the initiative of coming and addressing the regional groups and cross regional groups, so that I can make myself available to any

clarifications or questions that they might like to post to me as a member of the Government. And Mr. President, we will continue in our efforts to facilitate our bilateral and multilateral partners in complementing the efforts of the Government in the multi-pronged strategies that we will put into place in the post conflict era. This is why we must not engage in the naming and shaming game.

Mr. President it is also in this spirit that a broad based draft resolution has been co sponsored by many countries including Sri Lanka which we believe has even taken into account some of the constructive and practical suggestions made by some of our friends who were supportive of another resolution.

Mr. President I would also like to make the point that this is an implementable resolution which will in turn ensure a constructive outcome at the end of deliberations. We express the hope that it will be supported by everyone.

Mr. President Sri Lanka is a State which has come out of a 30 year conflict with its institutional structure in place. Even at the height of the conflict we were committed to ensure that the institutional structure was working in the conflict areas. This is a commitment we made on behalf of our people despite being aware that the LTTE were benefiting from the services we provided.

Sri Lanka Mr. President is a democracy where regular free and fair elections are held and a independent judiciary function. We are in the process of putting into place the recommendations and voluntary pledges we took on board as part of a UPR exercise and with the end of the conflict we believe that we are now in a better position to implement our plans for the promotion and protection of Human Rights in every nook and corner of our country.

Finally Mr. President, we are receptive to international cooperation and assistance, however as the affected State we have to preserve our right to decide the modalities and mechanism by which we would address these issues. They must be home-grown. The UN has recognised over a long period of time the nature of the assistance to be rendered to victims and the central role of the affected State. We have to be supported by the broad umbrella of international solidarity which will include member States and concerned international organizations.

We have engaged with the international community in a constructive and consistent basis and always cooperated as far back as the 1980s by subscribing to 13 core international human rights conventions and several optional protocols. We have put in place 11 pieces of domestic legislation which has given effect to the ICCPR and has effectively put in motion the implementation of these rights. We have put in place mechanisms to protect children in armed conflict to prevent recruitment of child soldiers.

Mr. President what I would like to leave behind in this room is our commitment as a government, as a nation to the fact that Sri Lanka is a multi cultural multi lingual multi ethnic and multi religious society. This is the great diversity and the strength of Sri Lanka. And we are committed and we believe in the fact that it is only through the protection and nurturing of this diversity that we can build the unity that we need to overcome the challenges that are before us in the national, reconstruction and development efforts that our country needs to put in place towards our goal of sustainable peace and development.

Thank you Mr. President.