**Time: 10 minutes**

**Statement by PRUN/Geneva**

**Fourth Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of Sri Lanka**

**Geneva, 1 February 2023**

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Sri Lanka delegation present in Geneva comprises senior officials from the Presidential Secretariat, the Attorney-General’s Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Permanent Mission in Geneva. Additionally, senior officials from over 20 line Ministries are virtually engaging in this Review from Colombo.

**(Process of drafting the National Report)**

1. At the Third Cycle of the UPR in 2017 Sri Lanka accepted 177 recommendations and undertook 12 voluntary pledges. Sri Lanka’s National Report submitted to the current cycle of the UPR contains an update on the progress made on these recommendations as well as current developments.
2. In line with the general guidelines, an inclusive and broad-based process was undertaken in the compilation of our National Report. The methodology followed was two-pronged: First, relevant Government stakeholders engaged in collating the required preliminary information; Thereafter, open consultations were held with Government stakeholders and civil society from across the country to obtain input for the National Report.
3. This inclusive process entailed civil society consultations held with the participation of over 65 CSOs from across the country. These consultations were held in hybrid format in the language of their choice and the input received has been incorporated into the National Report. I had the opportunity to chair one such consultation with the CSOs from the Northern Province. The Government appreciates the contribution made by the CSOs, during the compilation of our report. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was also consulted in these deliberations, and the Cabinet of Ministers has been apprised of this process.

**(21 Amendment)**

Mr. President,

Distinguished delegates,

Among some of the key developments that have taken place in the country in the recent months are the enactment of constitutional amendments to strengthen governance, independent commissions, financial accountability, transparency and combat corruption.

In October 2022 the Parliament of Sri Lanka passed **the 21st Amendment** to the Constitution, further strengthening democratic governance, independent oversight of key institutions, the composition of the Constitutional Council and independent commissions.

The Constitutional Council includes members of civil society. The Council has now started the process of calling for applications from those interested to be appointed as members of the Independent Commissions.

On 19 January 2023, the **Regulation of Election Expenditure Bill** was passed in Parliament and certified by the Speaker and passed into law. The passage of this Bill is expected to vest the Elections Commission with the powers to monitor campaign expenditure.

My delegation will later elaborate on steps taken towards combatting corruption.

**(Reconciliation efforts)**

Mr. President,

I thank those delegations who have posed advance questions with regard to reconciliation and wish to elaborate the following recent initiatives:

1. In order to garner the political support to achieve reconciliation and tangible progress on this important national issue, the President convened an All Party Conference, in December 2022 and January 2023. The convening of these Conferences was to take the reconciliation process forward.
2. The President appointed a **Cabinet Sub-Committee on Reconciliation** under his Chairmanship which includes the Prime Minister, to promote reconciliation among different communities and to address and resolve matters relating to issues encountered by the people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. At the recent meetings held by the Cabinet Sub-Committee, a wide range of issues were identified to be addressed expeditiously, including, inter alia, to develop a truth-seeking mechanism, drafting of a new counter-terrorism law, establishing an office for overseas Sri Lankans, prepare a Rapid Development Plan for the North and the East, and address matters related in particular to missing persons, resettlement and land.
3. Several discussions have taken place relating to a **Truth Seeking Mechanism** within the framework of the Constitution. The contours of such a model that would suit Sri Lanka are currently being assessed. The Cabinet of Ministers has approved the concept of the mechanism and an advisory committee has been appointed to initiate discussion and facilitate the drafting of legislation. This committee has already commenced meetings and work is underway.
4. Sri Lanka stands to benefit from the social and professional diversity of the Overseas Sri Lankans by tapping into their expertise, influence in their countries of residence, resources for the economic and social development of Sri Lanka and to supplement domestic reconciliation efforts. On 19 December 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the establishment of an **Office for Overseas Sri Lankan Affairs** which envisages to facilitate more vigorous engagement with overseas Sri Lankans encompassing all communities and generations and the process has been set in motion to operationalize the office.

Mr President,

Distinguished delegates,

1. I wish to elaborate on the progress made so far in relation to human rights and reconciliation through independent domestic institutions.
2. Recognizing the need for closure with regard to the fate of those alleged to be missing or disappeared in Sri Lanka, and with a view to protecting the rights and interests of the victims and their families, the **Office on Missing Persons** (OMP) was established as an independent statutory body in 2016. The Office continues to operate with financial provisions allocated for its functions by the National Budget. The OMP is recognized by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) as the primary statutory body in Sri Lanka mandated to deal with complaints related to missing persons.
3. The OMP takes a victim-centric approach in its public engagement and decision-making process. The Office has established mechanisms to expeditiously assist victims, their families, and witnesses.

1. The National Reparations Policy and Guidelines formulated by the **Office for Reparations** was approved by the Cabinet in 2021 and tabled in Parliament in February 2022. The OR has been providing monetary and non-monetary relief. The compensation amount has been further increased and necessary budgetary allocations has been made for 2023.

Mr President,

Distinguished delegates,

1. The **Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR)** continues to execute its mandate under 08 thematic areas and has assumed greater importance in building national unity and reconciliation through its continued activities related to social cohesion, conflict transformation, language training programmes for youth, government officials, community and religious leaders, and providing psychological assistance to victims.
2. In recognition of the important work carried out by ONUR, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the proposal on 23 January 2023 to establish it as a permanent office by an Act of Parliament.
3. The **Presidential Commission of Inquiry for ‘Appraisal of the Findings of Previous Commissions and Committees on Human Rights and the Way Forward’** presented its first Interim Report in 2021 and its recommendations resulted in the establishment of an Advisory Board under the PTA, making substantial amendments to it, and the release of detainees. Following public sittings in Colombo, Jaffna and Kilinochchi, its second Interim Report was submitted in February 2022 and the final report is expected shortly.

Mr. President,

The members of my delegation will elaborate on these issues as well as some of the other areas highlighted in the advance questions and in the interactive dialogue. We look forward to a fruitful discussion and constructive outcome from this very important exercise.

I thank you.