**Time: 8 minutes**

**Statement by Ms. Chandima Wickramasinghe**

**Additional Secretary to the President**

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

**Geneva, 1 February 2023**

Mr. President,

Distinguished delegates,

With regard to advance questions and comments on land release and resettlement of IDPs,

**(Issues of the Northern and Eastern Provinces)**

1. Sri Lanka has taken progressive measures to resolve the issues of the people living in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Most recently, a “**Special Unit on solving issues of people in the Northern Province**” was established directly under the purview of the Presidential Secretariat, to focus on expediting Northern development, reconciliation and national unity. To facilitate the work of this unit, a sub-office has been opened in Vavuniya District in the Northern Province to coordinate matters relating to land, housing, health, irrigation and agriculture, as well as to assist in the work of the **Office on Missing Persons** and the **Office for Reparations** in the province. This Unit will also assist in the work of the **Cabinet Sub-Committee on Reconciliation** under the Chairmanship of the President.

**(Release of lands and resettlement of IDPs)**

1. In terms of land release in the Northern and Eastern provinces, 92% of private lands retained by the military has been released to the legitimate civilian owners through local Government authorities as of January 2023.
2. In addition, **over 100 Acres of land** under the Army and Navy in Palaly in the Northern Province are scheduled to be released shortly. Further, certain lands required for expansion of the Palaly Airport will be made available for cultivation of seasonal crops.
3. Sri Lanka has initiated action to restore land ownership of people who had been traditionally occupying and cultivating their lands, but which had been declared as forest or wildlife reservations after they were abandoned due to conflict situation. A road map to remap such areas and grant deeds has now been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.
4. The Government has continued with the resettlement process. As of this month, a total of 2,324 families remain to be resettled. Of these, 149 live in welfare centres while 2,175 live with extended family or friends. It may be noted that 75 families living in welfare centres are due to be resettled shortly in 13 Acres of land released from the high security zone in Palaly.
5. A Special Committee has been appointed under the Ministry of Justice to look into the needs of Sri Lankan refugees returning from India. Mobile Services have been conducted to solve issues in registration, obtaining certificates in birth, death and marriage, and issuing citizenship certificates to the refugee returnees. A recently held Mobile Service in the North benefitted 179 such returnees. A similar Mobile Service will be held in Eastern Province this month.

 **(Discrimination against religious minorities and Hate speech)**

With regard to religious minorities and hate speech,

1. Article 12 (1) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees to all persons equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Article 12(2) guarantees the fundamental right to non-discrimination on the grounds of “race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any such grounds.”
2. Sri Lanka remains committed to a society where the rights of all communities are secured, and their safety and security is ensured. Therefore, human dignity is valued and equal treatment to every person irrespective of their religion, ethnicity or race is an accepted norm of public life. Steps are taken continuously to ensure that all communities have the space to express their identity, including the right to enjoy their own culture, profess and practice their own religion, and use, nurture and promote their own language. All communities participate fully in the life of the nation, whether it be at national, provincial or local level.
3. With the support of Development Partners, the **Office for National Unity and Reconciliation** is in the process of developing a **National Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism**. Since 2017, this Office has conducted 21 programmes for over 4,500 students to promote religious coexistence. More than 150,000 persons, including Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu and Christian clergy, professionals, opinion leaders and public servants have also been trained.
4. The Government does not condone any act of religious hatred or intolerance, and maintains a zero-tolerance policy on any such acts, and has taken measures to combat same.

1. In addition to the provisions of the Penal Code, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act of Sri Lanka criminalizes advocating religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Accordingly, no person is permitted to advocate national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes such incitement.

**(Food security)**

With regard to food security,

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. As such, Sri Lanka places great importance on ensuring food security for its people.
2. The Government is implementing a **Multi-sector Combined Mechanism for Food Security and Nutrition** involving all levels of government, from national to over 14,000 village-level administrative bodies to mitigate challenges related to food security and nutrition.
3. We have also adopted a **National Nutrition Policy** and established several initiatives including a **National Programme on Micronutrient Supplementation** targeting pregnant and lactating mothers, children under 5 years and all school children.
4. A programme to provide a **nutritional allowance** to pregnant mothers is in operation to eliminate low weight births and minimize malnutrition among expectant mothers. Around 350,000 pregnant and lactating mothers benefit from this programme annually.
5. A **Morning meal programme** is also implemented in pre-schools under guidance of the Ministry of Health to benefit 155,000 children in 6000 pre-schools throughout the country.
6. The **School Meal programme** is in operation in nearly 8,000 schools covering 1.1 million students representing all provinces. We have allocated 19 bn Sri Lanka Rupees from this year’s budget for this purpose.
7. We have also taken action to establish the **Partnership Secretariat for World Food Programme Cooperation** under the Presidential Secretariat for more effective coordination of the emergency response programme, livelihood development and capacity building of farmers and related institutions. The Secretariat is focused, among other things, on the modernization of agriculture and special assistance to vulnerable families.

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