**Time: 7.5 minutes**

**Statement by Ms. Rekha Gunasekera**

**Director General of the UN & HR Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

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

**Geneva, 1 February 2023**

Mr. President,

Distinguished delegates,

**(Anti-Corruption Bill)**

One of the key developments that has taken place in the country in recent months is related to anti-corruption.

1. The 21st Amendment to the Constitution passed by the Parliament of Sri Lanka in October last year, enhances the independence and powers of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery and Corruption, established in 1994, as the permanent body to investigate matters of bribery and corruption. The 21st Amendment enables measures to implement the UN Convention Against Corruption and any other international Convention relating to the prevention of corruption to which Sri Lanka is a party.
2. The proposed Anti-Corruption Bill to be submitted to Parliament envisages further strengthening of the activities of the Commission towards its functional independence and impartiality. It also promotes and advances the prevention of corruption practices by educating and raising awareness amongst the public to combat corruption. The proposed law will also assure the financial independence of the Commission.
3. In addition, the proposed law introduces an offense against conflict of interest and a system for obtaining assets and liabilities statements in a centralized e-system. The Electronic assets declaration system provides for ease of submission, verification and public access.

**(Engagement with the CSOs/ allegations of intimidation)**

Mr. President,

Several observations were made in relation to engagement with civil society.

1. Sri Lanka has a vibrant civil society and is committed to protecting and promoting their freedom of expression and civil society space.
2. Consultation and close engagement with civil society is maintained with a view to harness their insights, expertise and experience in achieving reconciliation and development. Such engagement has benefitted the drafting of laws as well as in compiling national reports. For instance, in the recent past, Sri Lanka engaged in constructive consultations with the civil society in drafting amendments to the PTA and in preparing the National Report for the current UPR. A regular dialogue with civil society on a wide range of issues continues.
3. There are different legal frameworks in place in relation to NGOs and INGOs. Among them, the Voluntary Social Services Organization (VSSO) Act is significant. In August 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the drafting of a new Bill to replace the existing VSSO Act. With a view to ensuring transparency and inclusivity in the drafting process, civil society has been requested to submit their proposals on the new Bill and also to nominate two representatives to the Committee appointed to draft the Bill. In addition, to simplify the NGO/INGO reporting process, the National Secretariat for NGOs has issued a circular in December 2023.

Mr. President,

With regard to questions pertaining to allegations of intimidation, it is emphasized that

1. Sri Lanka remains committed to ensuring that complaints received on alleged attacks against journalists, human rights defenders and civil society are investigated. All parties alleged to have experienced harassment can submit their complaints to different national mechanisms that have the competence and jurisdiction to receive and investigate such claims. These include law enforcement authorities as well as independent institutions such as the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and the National Police Commission.

**(SDGs)**

Mr. President,

We appreciate the questions posed in relation to Sri Lanka’s implementation of the SDGs. [At the 3rd Cycle, there were recommendations related to Sri Lanka’s implementation of the SDGs.]

1. In this regard it is notable that, the Sustainable Development Act No. 19 of 2017 established the Sustainable Development Council mandated with coordination, facilitation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development in Sri Lanka.
2. The 2021 Global Sustainable Development Report, has assessed that Sri Lanka’s performance on achieving the SDGs has been progressive. We continue to make progress in SDG Goals 1, 4, 12 and 13 and at present, Sri Lanka ranks 76 among 163 countries.
3. In order to accelerate progress on SDG 16 - ‘Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions’, an inter-agency Steering Committee was established under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice focusing on four core areas, i.e., strengthening public security and law enforcement, corruption control, access to justice and public service delivery. The Committee is in the process of formulating a combined Action Plan to achieve SDG 16 targets.
4. Sri Lanka’s Second Voluntary National Review was presented to the High-Level Political Forum of the ECOSOC in July 2022, following extensive consultations with Government, civil society and international development partners. This Review highlights the progress in integration of SDGs in the National Policy Framework and the enhanced institutional capacities for SDG governance, coordination, and monitoring since the first VNR in 2018.
5. Most recently in January this year, the Sustainable Development Council issued guidelines to all government ministries to identify nationally appropriate SDG targets in line with the respective mandate of each ministry. The objective of this exercise is to direct planning and resources of all government institutions towards SDGs amidst the economic challenges, as well as to ensure robust national level monitoring and progress evaluation.

**(Engagement with the UN)**

Mr. President,

We welcome the questions posed in relation to our engagement with UN special procedures and Treaty bodies.

Sri Lanka engages with the UN system in a spirit of constructive engagement and cooperation and will continue to do so.

1. Following Sri Lanka’s standing invitation to all thematic Special Procedures Mandate Holders, we had facilitated country visits by 5 special procedures mandate holders, since the last Review.
2. After acceding to the OPCAT in 2017, we facilitated the visit of the Sub Committee on the Prevention of Torture in April 2019.
3. During the period under review, we have submitted 03 periodic reports under ICCPR, CEDAW and ICRPD. We also participated in 02 reviews under the CRC and its optional protocol I. Sri Lanka will also be participating at the 6th periodic review under the ICCPR next month.

My colleague will now respond to further questions and comments raised. Thank you.

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