

**Remarks by the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Joint Briefing held with the UN
Resident Coordinator on Peacebuilding Priorities for Sri Lanka
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 December 2015**

Minister of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs, Hon.
M.S. Swaminathan,

UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative Mr. Subinay Nandy,

Excellencies,

Heads of UN Agencies in Sri Lanka,

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen.

- May I take this opportunity to welcome all of you to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs this afternoon. I like to thank you for taking off some of your valuable time to be here with us for the joint briefing by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Resident Coordinator on peacebuilding priorities.
- In fact, your support, Excellencies, has been, and is, a tremendous source of encouragement for the Government as we continue our journey on translating our promises to the people of Sri Lanka, especially in the context of the mandates that we received twice over this year in January as well as in August.
- In fact, as you are aware, the mandates we received included broadly, areas such as taking steps to,
 - strengthen good governance, democratic institutions and the rule of law;
 - promote and protect human rights;
 - fight corruption and strengthen accountability;
 - achieve economic development and employment generation that includes livelihood support and addressing social issues;
 - to undertake administrative and judicial reform; and of course
 - achieve reconciliation to ensure a durable peace and non-recurrence.
- You have all heard the President and the Prime Minister articulate the Government's vision for achieving reconciliation, development, and many of the areas that I just outlined.
- In fact, on the 9th of January next year, which is less than a month from now, a Special Session of Parliament will be convened to commemorate the 1st anniversary of President Sirisena's election; and on that day, a Resolution will be passed to establish a Constituent Assembly for the purpose of adopting a new Constitution, as promised by the Government, and also to abolish executive powers of the Presidency and transfer those powers to the Parliament.
- As you all know, soon after President Sirisena's election in January and the formation of the Government, I travelled to Washington DC and to New York. On the 13th of February, I had a very useful meeting, our Government's first in fact, with the Secretary-General of the UN, Mr. Ban Ki-moon. One of the issues that we discussed was the possibility for Sri Lanka to receive assistance, both financial and technical, through the UN Peacebuilding Fund, for setting up some of the structures and mechanisms that are essential to realise the Government's vision for reconciliation, durable peace and non-recurrence.

- The Secretary-General very kindly dispatched the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs immediately afterwards to Sri Lanka, following which our applications were submitted, initially for resources through the Immediate Response Facility of the Fund and subsequently, for longer-term funding.
- As you all know, Sri Lanka turned the page on the past at the Human Rights Council's 30th Session in September this year by working with Members of the Council and others to co-sponsor the Resolution '*Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka*', and facilitating its adoption by consensus.
- I know that most of you may have questions on what is being done to implement the provisions of the Resolution. In this context, I thought I will also take this opportunity to explain some of the Government's priorities today.
- In order to implement the Provisions of the Resolution, and more broadly, address other issues as well that come under the ambit of 'Reconciliation', we have set up:

-Firstly, a 'Prime Ministerial Action Group' (PMAG) chaired by the Prime Minister. This Group consists of the key Ministers whose participation is essential in formulating and implementing measures to give effect to our undertakings. In fact, PMAG Committee chaired by the Prime Minister includes the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs, Minister for Justice, Minister of State for Defence, and Minister for National Dialogue.

-Under the Prime-Ministerial Action Group is the Steering Committee which consists of Secretaries to key ministries and officials who are responsible for implementing the provisions of the Resolution. The Steering Committee is chaired by me and also includes some members of the Private Bar and Civil Society Representatives.

-In order to Coordinate the functions of the various line ministries and Departments in this endeavour, to service the Steering Committee, and carry out the day-to-day implementation of decisions, as well as coordinate the work related to the National Consultation Process, we are also setting up a 'Secretariat for Coordinating the Reconciliation Mechanisms'. In fact, the Cabinet Memorandum setting up this Secretariat is to be considered by the Members of Cabinet today.

- Working with the UN, four broad areas have been recognised for Peacebuilding support:

- (i) Reconciliation
- (ii) Transitional Justice or dealing with the Past
- (iii) Resettlement and socio-economic development
- (iv) Governance and Institutional reform

- (i) On Reconciliation, the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) headed by former President Kumaratunga, has been working to formulate projects in the priority areas of:

- Reconciliation within and between communities
- Dialogue with Overseas Sri Lankan Citizens; and
- Reconciliation initiatives in the areas of education, language policy, and psychosocial support

(ii) On Transitional Justice or dealing with the past, our main focus right now is to have the **national consultation process begin in January**. In fact, this is our number one priority at the moment.

-The Consultation Process will consist of two main components: the first would be consultations through written submissions and the second would be face-to-face consultations.

-Before the end of this year, we intend appointing or naming a Consultation Task Force consisting of members drawn mainly from Civil Society and Academia to be in-charge of the entire process of consultations.

-Assisted by an Expert Advisory Panel, the Task Force will frame the questions for the two phases of the consultations: written submissions and the face-to-face consultations with the relevant stakeholders.

-For the purpose of conducting the face-to-face consultations at provincial and district level, the Consultation Task Force will appoint Provincial and District Task Forces consisting of persons from the particular local areas in whom the public have confidence and trust.

-The written submission process will begin in mid-January, and the face-to-face consultations will begin during the first week of February. We hope to conclude the process of consultations in late March with the Rapporteurs finalising and presenting the Report to Government at the end of March. Thereafter, the actual designing and legislation for the different mechanisms for truth-seeking, justice and reparations will begin.

-You would recall in this connection that in my address to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on the 14th of September, I presented the Government's ideas of the nature of mechanisms that would require to be set up. These included:

- a Commission for Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Non-recurrence
- an Office on Missing Persons with assistance from the ICRC;
- a Judicial Mechanism with a Special Counsel; and
- an Office for Reparations.

-Heeding the advice of the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) that visited Sri Lanka last month after 16 years and acknowledging the need to address issues related to the families of Missing Persons without delay, we have decided to present to Cabinet hopefully in the first week of January itself, the proposal to begin drafting the legislation required for setting up the Office on Missing Persons.

-In the meantime, we are also working with OHCHR and the UN Country Team on getting the consultation process off the ground. I must also mention here that before drawing up the framework for consultations, we had a series of meetings and interactions with civil society representatives to obtain their views on what the consultation framework should be like; and their views have been included in the framework.

-Implementing the provisions of the Victim and Witness Protection Law and establishing the relevant bodies for this purpose is also a priority area that we are working on, and this is an area in which we would appreciate your support.

(iii) On Durable Resettlement and socio-economic development, we will focus on quick impact resettlement initiatives to serve as confidence building measures. This includes releasing land to resettle IDPs and returnees, as well as securing livelihood support for IDPs.

(iv) The area of Governance and Institutional Reform will cover electoral and constitutional reform; Security Sector Reforms; Good Governance initiatives; and **strengthening the Northern and Eastern Provincial authorities.**

- The Peacebuilding Process will be nationally driven, and the Government is firm in its commitment to ensure that it is an inclusive and participatory process.
- The Government will bring on board all key stakeholders including civil society, political parties, donors and of course the United Nations.
- It is our firm belief, Your Excellencies, that coordination among donors is important. Therefore, we are of the view that if all efforts could be channelled through the UN and a common framework could be put in place for providing financial and technical support by donors for peacebuilding, led by the UN, duplication could be minimised, and expertise and resources could be managed and utilised effectively and efficiently for the purposes required.
- In all these endeavours, we require your understanding and support. We require you to work with us and walk with us in our journey to achieve reconciliation and a durable peace.
- As we approach the end of 2015, I would also like to thank each and every one of you and through you, your respective Governments for the support extended to the Government and the people of our country during this exciting yet challenging year. I look forward to working with you even more closely in the coming Year.
- I will now give the floor to my colleague Hon. Swaminathan, Minister of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs; and Mr. Subinay Nandy, Resident Coordinator of the UN.

Thank you.