Peacebuilding Commission: Informal Meeting on Sri Lanka

New York, 20 November 2017
Sri Lanka: the country and its people

- Located, in the Indian Ocean, approximately 65,610 square kilometres in size, with a coastline of 1700 kilometres, located just 32 kilometres away from the southernmost tip of India.

- A recorded history of over 2500 years: featured in the travels of 13th century Muslim Scholar Ibn Battuta, and the 4th Century Chinese Pilgrim Fa-Hien.

- Subjected to Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule: primarily due to our country’s geographic location in the oceans of the world.

- Contacts between America and Sri Lanka, started when merchant ships from New England called at Galle harbour around the same time that the new American Republic adopted its Constitution in 1789.

- Sri Lanka was known in the ancient world as a trading hub and a land that was endowed with precious gems, spices, elephants and exotic fauna and flora.
Sri Lanka: the country and its people

• Sri Lankan Kings sent envoys to the Royal court of Roman Emperor Augustus
• Some traders and visitors settled in our country, making our country their home
• Buddhism has thrived in Sri Lanka since the arrival in the 3rd Century of Indian Emperor Asoka’s children
• Arab traders enriched our land with the teachings of Prophet Mohammed
• The symbol of the Nestorian Cross found in the ancient city of Anuradhapura, dated to within 500 years of the birth of Christ
• Hindu beliefs and customs have contributed to Sri Lankan culture significantly, and is engrained in the everyday lives of all
Sri Lanka: the country and its people

- Beauty and wealth of Sri Lanka had caught the imagination of Arab writers: the land they referred to as Serendib was incorporated into ‘Sinbad the Sailor’
- Siri Pada or Adam’s Peak, is a holy site for Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians.
- 6 cultural world heritage properties and 2 natural world heritage sites recognised by UNESCO
- Ancient historical sites of Sri Lanka: largest brick building in the world, in the 4th Century AD
- Roughly 21 million people who dwell in my country, share this land of 65,610 sq km with the largest land mammal on earth - 6000 elephants; while ocean around us is home to the largest marine mammal – the blue whale
- At Independence, in 1948: Sri Lanka was hailed as holding the potential to become the ‘Switzerland of the East’
- Per capita GDP at the time was second only to that of Japan, in Asia.
Sri Lanka and the UN

- Introduced universal adult franchise in 1931, oldest democracy in Asia
- Provided leadership to evolve the ‘Law of the Sea’ Convention
- Elected to the Security Council in 1960: five years after becoming a member of the UN
- Held the Presidency of the General Assembly in 1976
- Also chaired several important conferences of this Organisation
Post-independence Issues

01
Failed at inclusive nation-building, and successful, effective and efficient service-delivery mechanisms

02
Led to erosion of trust and confidence among communities

03
Led to two youth insurrections and a prolonged conflict involving terrorism

04
Violence affected all communities

05
Deprived ourselves of socio-economic heights

06
Strained international relations with the conclusion of the conflict in May 2009: international isolation
A New Beginning

- Presidential Elections: 8th January 2015

People voted for:
  - A change in political culture, against ethnic and religious division and against extremism on all sides and against impunity;
  - For a strong democracy and for the rule of law and good governance;
  - For reconciliation and sustainable peace;
  - Equality;
  - Upholding, promoting and protecting human rights of all and the pluralistic nature of our society; and
  - For inclusive and equitable growth and development in the country.

Re-set, Re-gain, Re-launch
A New Beginning

- Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, present Secretary-General Mr. Antonio Guterres, their respective teams at headquarters, UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Una McCauley, former RC Mr. Subhinay Nandy, OHCHR Senior Adviser on Human Rights, and the Reconciliation and Development Advisor: extremely supportive of Sri Lanka’s journey from the moment we reached out to the UN.

- Funding we received from the Immediate Response Facility and longer-term funding have been invaluable to us in a multitude of areas:
  - resettlement, technical expertise and advise for the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation, the SCRM.
Sri Lanka and Peace Building

- Most critical for us has been having the resources to obtain the right assistance at the right time, quickly, which the constraints of Government procedures do not often allow.

- Through the Peacebuilding Priority Plan, and Peacebuilding Board, the UN and the Government have succeeded in working together to identify areas where Government requires assistance.

- Government is firmly committed to work with the United Nations in Sri Lanka and the UN has gained the confidence of the people
  - Multiple visits of UN officials including the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the visits of Special Procedures

- UN Country Team: proactive and aligns itself with Government priorities

- UN assists the government with:
  - the SDGs,
  - reconciliation,
  - peacebuilding and development agenda
Sri Lanka and Peace Building

• Perception exists that progress in Sri Lanka has stalled or that progress is way too slow

• Sri Lanka, despite multiple challenges, has managed to achieve so much in multiple areas of policy, legal and economic reform, in just over 34 months

• There is much left to do, and we are definitely not complacent
Sri Lanka and Peace Building

• My colleagues will explain in detail,
  • the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Processes,
  • Importance of economic development to ensure the success and long-term sustainability of the reconciliation process;

It is essential for the international community and the United Nations to remain engaged in Sri Lanka, and assist Sri Lanka at this important time in our nation’s history.
Development begins with Reconciliation

01

Banners you see displayed outside and in this room are reproductions of 6 photographs (out of 75 photographs) from an exhibition titled ‘HOPE’ organized by ONUR

02

Our intention is to take this Exhibition around the country, along with an awareness raising campaign for reconciliation titled “Ahanna” – “Listen”

03

Reconciliation is essential for Sri Lanka to realize its vision of a stable, peaceful, reconciled and prosperous nation, for everyone.