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Sri Lanka receives broad cross-regional support in the HRC on substantive progress in the reconciliation process

Sri Lanka received strong cross-regional support in the Human Rights Council from countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America on Thursday (26 September 2013) which uniformly welcomed and commended the country's significant progress achieved in the reconciliation process.

Speaking at the General Debate under Agenda Item 10 which followed the previous day's presentation of the Oral Update of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on "Promoting Reconciliation and Accountability in Sri Lanka" as well as Sri Lanka's statement in response as the country concerned by Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha, Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, Asian, African and Latin American countries specifically commended the progress achieved by the Government of Sri Lanka in rehabilitation, resettlement, resolution of land issues, demining, livelihood development as well as addressing issues of accountability, and informed the Council that Sri Lanka needs to be commended and encouraged in the reconciliation process. They also welcomed the additional 53 recommendations of the LLRC accepted by Sri Lanka in July this year within the framework of the National Plan of Action.

Additionally, Western countries too joined Asian, African and Latin American countries in welcoming the recent elections held in three provinces including in the Northern Province, and commended the Sri Lankan Government for the cooperation extended as well as the unfettered access provided during the visit of High Commissioner Navanethem Pillay to Sri Lanka in August this year. The Philippines, Egypt and Kuwait noted with satisfaction that after her visit to Sri Lanka, the High Commissioner herself has acknowledged and commended the progress made by Sri Lanka in many areas in the reconciliation process.

Countries including Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela and Belarus highlighted the fact that the High Commissioner's Oral Update which is the result of Council resolution 22/1 on "Promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka" was rejected by Sri Lanka as the country concerned and recalled that it emanated from a politicised process and mandate rather than an objective assessment of the situation on the ground. Some of these countries recalled that at the time of the resolution's adoption with a vote in the Council, they had expressed their strong reservations and concerns on it. They also recalled that the work of the Council must be based on the principles of cooperation and genuine dialogue.

Australia indicated its “strong view that engagement, not isolation, is the most effective way to promote human rights in Sri Lanka”.

Azerbaijan noted the recent measures taken by Sri Lanka on the promotion and protection of human rights, and expressed the belief that all measures in the Council should be taken within a climate of mutual understanding and constructive cooperation.

Belarus while strongly rejecting the Update of the High Commissioner as the outcome of a politicised mandate, called on the co-sponsors of the resolution on Sri Lanka to reassess their position and work in cooperation and genuine dialogue with Sri Lanka.

Brazil said it is encouraged by the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka, in which a range of measures were undertaken, including with regard to implementing the recommendations of the LLRC including acceptance of an additional 53 recommendations in July. Brazil also identified significant progress in areas such as IDP resettlement, reconstruction, demining, resolution of land issues, among others.

China while commending the Sri Lankan Government for the substantive progress achieved in many areas in the reconciliation process, highlighted that the primary responsibility in promoting human rights lies with the country concerned.

Cuba while commending the Sri Lankan Government for the progress achieved and elaborating on numerous measures, indicated that it is against politicised selective measures undertaken in the Council against Sri Lanka.

Egypt while appreciating the genuine commitment the Sri Lankan Government has demonstrated to the reconciliation process through a range of substantive measures undertaken, also reiterated that any action taken in the promotion and protection of human rights of a country must have the consent of that country, and be based on the principles of cooperation and genuine dialogue which govern the Council as stipulated in GA resolution 60/251 and the Institutional Building package.

Indonesia welcomed Sri Lanka’s continued engagement with international human rights mechanisms, and appreciated “Sri Lanka’s regular update on the progress and challenges”, both at the Council and at the Universal Periodic Review sessions. Indonesia also extended its solidarity and best wishes to the people and Government of Sri Lanka in their future endeavours in promoting and protecting human rights.

Japan while welcoming the visit of the High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, and appreciating the important progress in reconciliation including the holding of the Northern Provincial Council elections, commended the Sri Lankan Government’s announcement to accept visits by Special Rapporteurs on IDPs and Education. On the implementation of the LLRC Action Plan Japan said it would be beneficial for Sri Lanka to make use of the support of the OHCHR in this process, and that Japan also remains committed to providing necessary support for Sri Lanka.

Kuwait welcomed the holding of elections in the 3 provinces among other measures taken by Sri Lanka, and expressed support to Sri Lanka in its continued efforts in strengthening the democratic process despite numerous challenges.

Myanmar while expressing its firm belief that “constructive engagement and genuine dialogue would be the best way forward”, noted that Sri Lanka “deserves due recognition for the progress achieved so far” in reconciliation.

New Zealand welcomed Sri Lanka’s “on-going transformation from a situation of conflict to a focus on building peace and development”, and indicated that it “was pleased to see that the Government’s substantive progress on resettlement, reconstruction and rehabilitation has been acknowledged”.

Norway indicated that the high turnout of voters in all three provinces holding elections is “an important milestone for the democratic process in Sri Lanka”.

Pakistan informed the Council that notwithstanding Sri Lanka’s non-recognition of the resolution 22/1, it notes that the Government of Sri Lanka has demonstrated its genuine commitment to the reconciliation process within the framework of its domestic process of reconciliation, and expressed the belief that “the progress achieved by Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the victory against terrorism, outweighs the challenges, and it should be commended.” Pakistan added that it is regrettable that the High Commissioner’s Oral Update does not give due regard, recognition nor acknowledgement to the significant progress made by Sri Lanka in the reconciliation process.

The Philippines commended Sri Lanka “for its relentless efforts to advance, protect and fulfil the human rights of its people and its demonstrated commitment to the reconciliation process”, and added that they were encouraged notably by the 2012 provincial GDP growth rate of 25.9 percent and 25 percent of the Northern and Eastern provinces, respectively.

The **Russian Federation** in its statement informed that it is against the consideration of Sri Lanka in the Council, and noted that it cannot agree with some of the assertions in the High Commissioner’s Update which can be construed as going beyond her mandate. The Russian Federation also highlighted that the successful holding of the provincial council elections in the North where the Tamil party won was only possible after the defeat of terrorism by the Government which has brought peace to the country with no bomb explosions or terrorist attacks having taken place in Sri Lanka in the past four years.

South Sudan appreciated “the significant progress made by the Government of Sri Lanka towards reconciliation and accountability”, and commended its endeavours in promoting human rights of the entire population.

Thailand welcomed the Sri Lankan Government’s acceptance of additional recommendations made by the LLRC and its commitment to implement them within the National Plan of Action. Thailand also noted that they knew “from experience that

reconciliation will take time". Thailand said it was pleased to learn of the Government's dialogue with the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances to address the cases of disappearances.

Uzbekistan noted that the international community must take note of the progress achieved by Sri Lanka in the reconciliation process, and among other measures welcomed the creation of a Ministry of Law and Order.

Venezuela while commending the Government of Sri Lanka for progress, strongly rejected interventionist attempts at internal processes emanating from politicised mandates.

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