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வெளிநாட்டு அலுவல்கள், வெளிநாட்டு வேலைவாய்ப்பு மற்றும் சுற்றுலாத்துறை அமைச்சு
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, FOREIGN EMPLOYMENT AND TOURISM

Statement delivered by Hon. Vijitha Herath, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism at the 60th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva
8th September 2025

Mr. President,
 High Commissioner,
 Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I speak to you on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka at a time when my country has embarked on a historic journey towards transformational change. This journey is about democratic governance, human rights, inclusive economic growth and national unity.

In March this year, 3 months after the National Peoples Power (NPP) Government assumed office, I addressed the High-Level Segment of this Council and outlined the clear vision of the Government to bring in meaningful and progressive change that would advance the rights and well-being of all Sri Lankans.

Six months on, as the High Commissioner presents his report on Sri Lanka today, I am pleased to share with you the tangible progress that we have achieved in translating this vision of change into a reality.

Mr. President,

President Anura Kumara Disسانayake was elected following the Presidential Election in September 2024. The subsequent Parliamentary elections in November 2024 established the new government with an overwhelming mandate from all communities in the country. It was the first time in the history of Sri Lanka that the people of the Northern, Eastern and Central provinces of the country extended such support to one political party.

The current Parliament is one of the most inclusive legislatures in Sri Lanka's history, with a record number of women and representatives of different communities. For the first time, two female members from the Malaiyahar community and a visually impaired person were also elected/appointed as MPs.

Within months of assuming office, the Government took steps to hold the Local Government elections, which had been delayed for several years, thereby further upholding the people's franchise. Both the Parliamentary election and Local Government election were conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner, and for the first time, there was zero post-election violence and zero misuse of state resources for election purposes – in a clear manifestation of the Government's determination to

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 17ஆவது தளம், "மெஹேவரா பியேச", நாரஹேன்பிட்டி, கொழும்பு 5

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change the political culture that had prevailed for many decades. The elections for the Provincial Councils will be conducted by the independent Election Commission once the delimitation process concludes.

Mr. President,

When President Anura Kumara Disanayaka assumed office 11 months ago, Sri Lanka was grappling with the debilitating effects of an unprecedented economic crisis. The effects of the economic crisis and the fiscal measures implemented to address it were causing immense hardships for all segments of the population, especially the poorest and the most vulnerable segments of society. The immediate priority for the Government, therefore, was to alleviate the economic challenges faced by Sri Lankans, through a series of social security, welfare and empowerment measures.

Special relief was extended to the farming, fishing and other vulnerable economic sectors throughout the country, while the 2025 National Budget made historic allocations for health and education. Increased funds were allocated for social welfare and security, while focused empowerment measures were extended to vulnerable groups such as women, children, including orphaned, disabled or autistic children, the estate sector population, students, persons with disabilities and people living in conflict-affected or underdeveloped areas of the country.

The Government has been actively working to develop infrastructure, support livelihoods and promote industries in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, aiming to enhance connectivity and support regional development. Rs.1,500 million has been allocated to meet the needs of resettlement, expedite the housing programme and provide essential relief to the families.

Today, we have succeeded in stabilising the economy, and we are currently in the process of laying the foundation for economic transformation and greater economic democratization through fair distribution of opportunities. At the same time, we are aware of the continuing impact of the economic challenges on our people, and the Government continues to take decisive steps to advance their economic and social rights.

Mr. President,

The Government firmly believes that strengthening national unity and reconciliation is integral to the development of the country. We believe in economic development which is inclusive, which draws on the contributions of and offers benefits to people of all regions of the country. It is only if we work together as a nation and root out division, racism and corruption that we can achieve our national aspirations, including economic growth. With this in mind, the Government has already rolled out a series of reforms and programs within a short time of 11 months, to promote ethical governance and combat corruption, while advancing national unity, reconciliation and human rights.

Allow me to present to you a few highlights of the transformative journey we have undertaken thus far:

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17ஆவது தளம், "மெஹேவரா பியேச", நாரஹேன்பிட்டி, கொழும்பு 5

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- During the past several months, the Government brought in new legislation to strengthen the anti-corruption drive. Independent investigations and prosecutions are being undertaken by authorities on alleged perpetrators, irrespective of their social status and without any political interference. These efforts have led to several landmark convictions. This has given a strong message that corruption will not be tolerated, thereby reinforcing public trust in our institutions. These decisive steps also reflect our collective commitment to justice and fairness, which all Sri Lankans expect and deserve. Despite challenges, our determination remains firm, as we believe a corruption-free Sri Lanka is vital for the well-being and dignity of every citizen.
- At the beginning of this year, the Clean Sri Lanka program was launched by the President with a view to promoting a new political culture and commitment to moral and ethical governance in the country. All government institutions have devised and are in the process of implementing coordinated action plans towards this end.

Mr. President,

We have also set in motion several processes to bring national laws and policies in line with international human rights standards.

- A committee appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers is formulating proposals for a new counter-terrorism legislation that would repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The views of the public have been called, and UN experts have been engaged to obtain insights on international best practices. Based on these deliberations, the Government expects to gazette a new counter terrorism legislation this month. To effectively address organised crime in the country, the Government has also commenced work on a new Organised Crime Bill.
- To address concerns raised by various stakeholders, amendments are being formulated to the Online Safety Act. Media notices have presently been published in all three languages, inviting observations of the public on proposals for reforming the Act.
- To further enhance civic space and engagement, measures are underway to bring the National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organisations under the Ministry of Social Empowerment.
- New legislation, including a revised Domestic Violence Bill is being drafted to further advance women's rights while a mechanism has been put in place to implement Sri Lanka's commitments under the CEDAW. Draft legislation is being formulated to further advance children's rights, and the new Disability Rights Bill will introduce a rights-based approach. Sri Lanka's engagement in this area is also reflected in the leadership we provide as the Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- For the first time in history, the current Government recognised the Malaiyahar community as a distinct community in Sri Lanka and we are currently following the

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necessary Government processes to formalise this recognition. We are also formulating legislation to facilitate the increase of wages of the plantation sector workers, while over 5000 new houses are to be handed over shortly to address the housing needs of the community.

Mr. President,

The Government's commitment to advancing reconciliation, human rights and the well-being of all Sri Lankans has been clearly outlined by the President on several occasions and also during my interaction with this Council.

As a political movement that has been at the receiving end of oppression and rights violations on many occasions, we genuinely believe in the fundamental importance of human rights and identify with the immense pain and suffering of Sri Lankans who were affected by conflicts on all sides.

In this regard, I wish to recall that the political movement which I represent was the first to call for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission soon after the war ended in 2009, long before the UN highlighted this need.

Mr. President,

Our commitment in this regard, is therefore, not merely driven by the need to comply with the Human Rights Council or other human rights mechanisms and treaties. It is a commitment that arises from our principles and experience and the paramount need to ensure the rights and well-being of our own people.

As President Disanayaka has reiterated, we are firmly and genuinely committed to working towards a country that respects and celebrates the diversity of its people with no division or discrimination, and we are resolved not to leave room for a resurgence of racism or extremism.

We are also committed to ensuring that any person alleged to have committed any unlawful act is investigated, prosecuted and brought before courts through an independent national process, irrespective of their social status, background or any other ground.

In keeping with this policy, proactive measures have been taken to investigate and prosecute alleged violations of laws, irrespective of the background of the persons concerned. All of you observing the developments in Sri Lanka would have witnessed several examples in this regard.

Permit me to briefly outline the key steps that the Government has taken:

- In the short period since the Government took office, a number of confidence-building measures have been taken, including reopening some roads in the Northern province for

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17ஆவது தளம், "மெஹேவரா பியேச", நாரஹேன்பிட்டி, கொழும்பு 5

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public use after several decades, and extending an open invitation to Tamil-speaking youth to be part of Sri Lanka police.

- Last week, President Anura Kumara Disanayaka visited the Northern Province again, where he launched several development programmes and reiterated the Government's commitment to protecting the land, linguistic, and cultural rights of the people of the North and their right to truth.
- The Government continues to strengthen the domestic reconciliation mechanisms – the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), Office for Reparations, and Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) – by guaranteeing their independence and making the necessary financial and human resource allocations. To this effect, a week ago, the Cabinet decided to allocate Rs. 375 million of additional funds to the OMP for the purpose of expediting inquiries into complaints regarding missing persons, considering it as a special priority.
- A process has been set in motion to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).
- Investigations independent of any Government interference are being conducted under judicial oversight into the grave sites, including in Chemmani. The Government has and will continue to provide adequate resources for the related processes. During his visit to Sri Lanka, High Commissioner Turk had the opportunity of visiting the Chemmani site and getting to know the processes that have been put in place in this regard.
- The Government is committed to advancing accountability through credible domestic processes. Recent decisions by the Sri Lankan courts demonstrate the independence of the Sri Lankan judiciary.
- To further enhance the delivery of justice, a decision has been taken to establish an independent public prosecutor's office. Views have been sought from the general public and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.
- The Government has afforded full independence to the Police, and investigations have been resumed into many longstanding cases, including the Easter Sunday attacks, attacks against journalists, etc. At the same time, we have not hesitated to take stern action against abuse of power by any public official.
- The ONUR is in the process of formulating an Action Plan on National Reconciliation with the support of the United Nations Country Office in Sri Lanka.
- A large majority of lands have been released, and the Government has assured that all land except those considered essential for national security will be returned to rightful owners, with adequate compensation paid where release is not possible. Processes are also underway to address competing claims and establish ownership where disputes remain. In August, the Cabinet appointed a Committee to address land issues faced by

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people, including conflict-affected people, living in areas identified as forest and other reserves and places of archaeological significance.

On this matter, we wish to reiterate that the gazette referred to in the High Commissioner's Report was issued in good faith with the genuine intention of addressing the issue. Upon being informed of the concerns, the gazette was recalled by the Government even before a court ruling was issued to that effect.

- The Government has upheld the right to memorialise loved ones who lost their lives during the conflict, so long as this right is not misused to glorify terrorism. Accordingly, memorialisation events were freely held in different parts of the country this year, as acknowledged in the High Commissioner's report.
- We remain fully committed to guaranteeing an enabling environment and space for civil society to operate freely, and will not hesitate to take action on any alleged harassment or intimidation.
- In line with the Government's vision for a reconciled Sri Lanka, the Office of the President is making arrangements to celebrate a 'Sri Lanka Day' in the first week of December 2025.
- The Attorney General would prefer indictments only if there is a prima facie case against an accused, and as such the negative portrayal of the Attorney General Office in the Report does not stand to reason. The prosecutorial discretion of the Attorney General is not an unfettered power and is subject to the full force of judicial review.
- The reference to the amended Personal Data Protection Act in the Report is erroneous as the proposed revisions are not related to exemptions as indicated.

Mr. President,

On the international front, we have engaged constructively with the HRC and the High Commissioner's Office as well as with the regular human rights mechanisms of the UN. The most recent manifestation of this engagement, including at the highest levels, was the visit undertaken by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to Sri Lanka two months ago, in June 2025.

During his visit, the High Commissioner had the opportunity to experience first-hand the real momentum of change across all segments of the Sri Lankan society and the Government's ongoing initiatives promoting ethical governance, human rights and national unity. We were encouraged by the High Commissioner's acknowledgement of the government's genuine openness to address issues and the measures to address corruption. The High Commissioner stated that Sri Lanka can become an example of peaceful co-existence while embracing its diversity as a strength.

We observe that the High Commissioner's report presented today contains both positive developments in the country as well as some concerns. The Government has provided its comments on the contents of the report, which have already been shared with the members and observers of the Council.

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In his current report, the High Commissioner for Human Rights has identified that Sri Lanka has an opportunity “to implement transformative reforms”.

I trust that all of you will agree that within a short time of 11 months, the Government has taken a series of tangible and decisive actions which clearly demonstrate its genuine commitment and ability to make use of this opportunity identified by the High Commissioner and further advance the rights of our people.

As already mentioned, the Government’s commitment to advancing reconciliation, human rights and the well-being of all Sri Lankans is not merely driven by our engagement with the Council. It is a commitment that arises from our genuine belief in the fundamental importance of human rights and the need to ensure the rights and well-being of our own people.

Mr. President,

The Government is fully cognizant of the responsibility that accompanies the unprecedented mandate it has received from the people, and is committed to fulfilling their aspirations of a just, fair and prosperous society. We sincerely believe that external action will only serve to create divisions, thereby jeopardising the genuine and tangible national processes that have already been set in motion. The Government is opposed to any external mechanism imposed on us such as the Sri Lanka Accountability Project.

Therefore, Mr. President, my earnest submission to members of this Council, its observers and all stakeholders is to collaboratively join hands with the government, to deepen our mutual understanding and extend your support to Sri Lanka. Our genuine and sincere approach, which is visible, needs to be reciprocated with deeper understanding and noticeable appreciation. We urge that all of you assist us in seizing this historic opportunity to advance the rights and well-being of all Sri Lankans **through our own domestic processes**.

Thank you.

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☎ 2 325 373/5, 2 207 200/7

✉ cypher@mfa.gov.lk

Foreign Employment
විදේශ රැකියා
வெளிநாட்டு வேலைவாய்ப்பு

📍 **17th Floor, "Mehewara Piyesa", Narahenpita, Colombo 5**
17 වන මහල, "මෙහෙවර පියස", නාරාහේන්පිට, කොළඹ 5
17-ஆவது தளம், "மெஹேவர பியேச", நாரஹேன்பிட்டி, கொழும்பு 5

☎ 2 331 200

✉ info@mfe.gov.lk

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696/4, මරදාන පාර, කොළඹ 10
696/4, மருதாண வீதி, கொழும்பு 10

☎ 2 381 798, 2 321 222

✉ secretary@tourismmin.gov.lk