

No move against Sri Lanka at the Seventh Session of the UN Human Rights Council



**The Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Office at Geneva
28th March 2008**

The four-week-long Seventh Session of the UN Human Rights Council which was held from 3rd to 28th March will conclude its work in Geneva today, with Sri Lanka as one of its 47 members, actively participating in the deliberations.

The Council took action on more than 35 resolutions and decisions on the promotion and protection of human rights and Sri Lanka was not on its agenda once again. There was no action taken by the Council on the country's human rights situation in any of the three standard forms, namely a resolution, a special session or a statement by the President of the Council. A clear majority of members of the Council showed their solidarity with Sri Lanka in its efforts to promote and protect human rights while combating terrorism.

Reference to Sri Lanka's human rights situation was made by several Western countries and Sri Lankan and international NGOs which attended the Seventh Session. However, such criticism fell well short of gaining necessary support within the Council for any specific action on Sri Lanka due to a successful briefing campaign spearheaded by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN in Geneva. This campaign was a part of Sri Lanka's long-standing policy of open and constructive engagement with the international community on human rights issues.

High-Level Segment

This successful briefing campaign began during the first week of the Council, which was devoted to a high-level segment, with the Sri Lanka delegation led by Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe and consisting of H.E. Dr. Dayan Jayatilleka, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN in Geneva, Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary-General of the Secretariat for Co-ordinating the Peace Process, Mr. Suhada Gamlath, Secretary, Ministry of Justice and Law Reform, Mr. Mohan Peiris, P.C., Consultant to the Ministry of Defence, Mr. Asoka Wijetilake, Deputy Inspector-General of Police, and Mr. Shavindra Fernando, Deputy Solicitor-General. Counsellors of the Permanent Mission, Mr. Sumedha Ekanayake and Mr. O.L. Ameerajwad were members of the delegation throughout all stages of the month long session.

During the high-level segment, Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe and the delegation conducted bilateral meetings with, among others, the Vice President of Colombia, Foreign Ministers of Cuba, Iran, Nepal, the Maldives, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovakia, Norway, and the UK, and the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs of India, Turkey, Japan, Belarus, Portugal, and Ukraine.

As a part of the comprehensive programme organized by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka, the Hon. Minister also attended a working breakfast, working lunch and a dinner hosted by the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka and attended by the Permanent Representatives of almost 40 countries representing all regions of the world.

Ambassador Dayan Jayatilleka was an invitee at the working breakfast hosted by Foreign Minister Mottaki of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Hon. Minister Samarasinghe, Ambassador Jayatilleka and the delegation addressed the Asian Group, African Group, Western European Group, Eastern European Group and the Organization of Islamic Conference of the Human Rights Council. The Hon. Minister and the delegation addressed a lunch-time panel discussion titled 'Sri Lanka: The case against an International Monitoring Mission' organized by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka. This event was attended by a number of delegations, INGOs and media.

Substantive Session

During the substantive session of the Council, a second Sri Lanka delegation arrived, with Deputy Solicitor-General Yasantha Kodagoda and the Legal Director of the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) Ms. Shirani Goonetilleka, joining Mr. Shavindra Fernando, Deputy Solicitor-General and Mr. G. Amarawardena, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights. They addressed the second lunch-time panel discussion titled 'War, Peace and Human Rights: Sri Lanka after the Eastern Elections', organized by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka and attended by a number of delegations, INGOs and media.

During the Seventh Session of the UN Human Rights Council, Sri Lanka co-sponsored five resolutions on subjects such as the composition of the staff of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, human rights and climate change, human rights and extreme poverty, mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the right to food. Dr. Dayan Jayatilleka spoke several times in support of resolutions presented by Cuba on behalf of the Non Aligned Movement. Sri Lanka also voted in favor of resolutions presented by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

The Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka H. E. Dr. Dayan Jayatilleka, who is a Vice-President of the Human Rights Council addressed the Council on two occasions in his capacity as the Chairperson/Rapporteur of the Inter-Governmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance. In the same capacity, he also moderated a high-level panel discussion titled "Dignity and Justice: the Cornerstones of Combating Racial Discrimination", which was held to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in a panel which included the Director General of the UN in Geneva, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze and the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights Madam Louise Arbour.

The next session of the Human Rights Council is due to be held in June 2008 in Geneva. Sri Lanka will be seeking re-election to the Council during elections to be held in May 2008 in New York soon after the country's human rights situation is reviewed under the Universal Periodic Review of the Council on 13th May in Geneva.