

Opening Statement by Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva, Head of
Delegation, GoSL - Geneva Talks October 28,29, 2006



28 October 2006

I. Introduction

Honorable Minister Erik Solheim, the Special Envoy Mr. Bauer members of the SLMM members of the LTTE delegation, Colleagues:

On the last occasion when we assembled in Geneva in February 2006, the delegation of the Government of Sri Lanka, on behalf of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa, expressed the hope that our discussions would open a fresh chapter in the dialogue between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. We came here with much hope and optimism. It was also an opportunity for the LTTE to become familiar with the general approach and methodology of His Excellency, Mahinda Rajapaksa to the ongoing conflict, which is based on the concept of a just and honorable peace. The fact that we are meeting today for a second round of discussions is a reflection of our continuing commitment to this approach. At all times the Government of Sri Lanka has been ready and willing to continue with the dialogue and we are indeed grateful to the international community and governments of Switzerland and Norway for making the stalled discussions once again a reality. We thank the co-chairs for their continuing support for the peace process. We thank the government of Switzerland for its generous hospitality and warm support.

Our discussions last February were frank and open. No doubt, there were difficult moments. But such moments are often present in talks of this nature and is not a reason for discouragement, but an opportunity for parties to work harder at overcoming challenges in the interest of peace. We believe that the two days we spent together represented a small, yet important step toward developing an understanding to move the peace process forward towards a permanent settlement.

I would like to express the hope of the Government of Sri Lanka that our discussions over the next two days will help to build the required atmosphere and move the country forward to the realization of a just and honorable peace; a peace based on the principles of a true democracy and human rights. We must strive for a peace that can provide the foundation for economic development and progress in all parts of Sri Lanka and for all the people of our country. A peace that will deliver justice and fair play to all sections of the people, especially the Tamil community, in political, economic and social terms.

As H.E.the President said at the UN General Assembly in September “ *having been a human rights campaigner at the grass roots level throughout my political life, it was natural that my new government should be committed to carrying the message of democracy to all corners of our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country.*

Democracy, equity and prosperity is our clarion call.”

The President, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, has consistently adopted an approach that has enjoyed the fullest endorsement of a broad spectrum of political parties. The sweeping victory in the local government elections in April reaffirmed and strengthened the mandate that His Excellency, Mahinda Rajapaksa, received at the Presidential Elections in November 2005, to seek a just and honorable peace. The President’s approach to the peace process and the Government’s participation at the proposed talks with the LTTE in April 2006 received further support from a clear majority of political parties, including the main opposition party, during the All Party Conference (APC) held on 10 April 2006. Today the main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP) stands united with the Government thereby ensuring that over 90% of the voters at the last election are in accord with the President’s approach. At the All Party Conference, many of the political parties expressed the hope that the Government and the LTTE would be able to move the dialogue into more substantive issues so that a sustainable solution to the conflict could be discussed in a more meaningful manner.

It is unfortunate indeed that the Geneva talks did not take place in April 2006 as scheduled, for the Government had hoped to progress rapidly to an environment in which substantive benefits could be discussed and delivered to the people.

The government had been ready to come to Geneva but the LTTE had without cause refused to resume talks in Geneva, despite repeated efforts by the facilitator and other well-meaning intermediaries. Even after being taken to Oslo in June 2006 at the cost of the Norwegian government, they refused to talk to the government delegation.

Nevertheless we are glad that the LTTE has sent a delegation here today to resume our dialogue with them. We reiterate the Government’s strong commitment to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Since April 2006 His Excellency the President and the Government of Sri Lanka have taken a number of initiatives to facilitate the realization of a negotiated settlement to resolve the national problem. Significant among them is the endeavor to develop constitutional proposals with broad support. The main aim has been to find an indigenous solution that will lead to an end to the decades of internal strife, and enable all people to live in dignity and peace in Sri Lanka.

The Government has emphasized the fact that the task of finding a political solution to the national question requires a multi-party effort and an inclusive approach. In this context the formation of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) and the appointment of a Panel of Experts on 11 July is a significant step in reaching a national consensus among political parties.

At the Inaugural Meeting of the APRC and the Panel of experts on 11 July 2006, The President H.E. Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse stated, *“any solution needs to as a matter of urgency allow people to take charge of their own destiny. This has been tried out successfully in many parts of the world. There are many examples from around the world that we may study as we evolve a truly Sri Lankan constitutional framework including*

our immediate neighbor India. Improving the lives of Sri Lankans all over the country is our ambition. Improving the lives of the impoverished in the North and the East is a priority.”

The mandate given to the APRC and the Panel of Experts as outlined in the President’s speech is to *“fashion creative options that satisfy the minimum expectations...as well as provide a comprehensive approach to the resolution of the national question”* He wished them success *“in their collective endeavor in formulating a political and constitutional framework for the resolution of the national question”*.

The aim of the Government is to engage the various political parties discuss their different approaches and through their deliberations arrive at a broad framework that will generate consensus.

The APRC and the Panel of Experts have met on a regular weekly to bi-weekly basis and have confirmed that they have made significant progress in their deliberations. The APRC is expected to produce its report shortly.

Strengthening the political process, the Government initiated discussions with the main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP), on 15 September 2006 primarily to facilitate reaching political consensus in the South. Discussions were based on a 6-point common minimum national agenda put forward, consisting of: peace, good governance, electoral reform and social development. The two parties have signed an MOU on 23 October 2006. The UNP in the MOU extended its support to the government *“in its pursuit of a negotiated settlement to the on-going conflict while opposing terrorism in all its manifestations and upholding human rights”*. The strengthened political consensus in the South is a significant step in formulating a new constitutional framework for the resolution of the conflict and in particular one that will address the needs of the people in the North and the East.

It is against the backdrop of this widespread support, and in accordance with the consultations the Government has undertaken with the political parties, that I am leading the Government’s team today, to present you with the government’s view of the developments of the recent past, its vision for the future, and its expectations for moving the peace process forward. It also gives us pleasure that the LTTE has expressed its agreement to discussing the core issues with a view to resolving this vexing problem.

II. Objectives for October 2006 Talks

At the outset, it is important to set our meeting here in Geneva in context, in order to understand the nature of the approach that the Government would like to take in these negotiations. We do not wish to treat this forum as an opportunity to score debating points or as an opportunity to make legal submissions as in a courtroom. We do not want to argue back and forth about details of various incidents, or present academic arguments. The opportunity that we have here today in Geneva is one where we can address core issues and address the challenges that lie in the way of a peaceful future.

If we want these talks to be of relevance beyond these walls, if they are to be meaningful for our people, there is an urgent need to address the issues of democracy, human rights,

and economic development, and thereby ensure that all the people of our country will enjoy the same rights. It is our responsibility to move beyond peripheral constraints and to begin taking steps towards a permanent peace in Sri Lanka and in particular address the aspirations of the people of all our people, in particular, in the East and the North.

The government, reflecting its commitment, is here today despite, I repeat, despite the horrendous campaign of terror and violence undertaken by the LTTE in the period since April. A total of 897 service personnel have been killed since Geneva I, that is the period from 24th Feb to 17th October 2006. Many were killed indiscriminately, while being unarmed. Many while going on leave. The LTTE have been responsible for a total of 1363 killings including civilians in the same period. These figures when compared with the total number of killings by them between February 2002 to 17th October 2006, make it apparent that in the period since the Geneva talks of February 2006 there has been an alarming rise in violent incidents in which the LTTE have blatantly launched provocative attacks on the security forces as well as civilians. It is also disturbing to find that the LTTE have systematically assassinated other Tamils who chose to differ from the views held by the LTTE, leaving no room for any other Tamil political voice to be heard.

They also killed the Deputy Head of the Peace Secretariat, a man of peace and an intellectual – an act of alarming barbarity.

At the same time the recruitment of children by the LTTE for military purposes has continued unabated, paying scant respect to the abhorrence expressed by the international community, including the UN Security Council, to this appalling practice. Since the Geneva talks in February 2006 the level of violence was rapidly escalated when LTTE deliberately denied water to over 60,000 civilians by closing the Mavil Aru sluice gate in July 2006. This was an act of senseless callousness.

In an act of blatant ethnic cleansing, the LTTE evicted the Muslims from Muttur in August. It is indeed ironic that the LTTE which complains of minority discrimination and hardship should ruthlessly target the Muslims, another minority community mostly of Tamil speakers. We recall that its campaign of ethnic cleansing commenced by forcing 90,000 Muslims and all the Sinhalese from the North in 1991, later the Muslims from Mannar and thereafter the LTTE concentrated on methodically victimizing Muslims living in the East.

The violence and endless carnage unleashed by the LTTE in the post Geneva talks period is well documented. Many of the major incidents show a high degree of brutality and complete disregard of human conduct. The most recent suicide bomb attack by the LTTE on 16 October 2006, that killed more than 100 unarmed Navy personnel going on home leave and injured more than 100 others as they rested, along the Dambulla – Habarana road, has shocked the national and international community. The outrage of many nations has been expressed in no uncertain terms over these most ruthless and barbaric killings.

The GOSL is all the more dismayed and shocked over the LTTE's violent designs aimed at deliberately contriving an ethnic backlash by provocations of this nature in the Sinhala

majority areas and selecting civilian areas.

The most horrendous act was on 15 June when the LTTE detonated two claymore mines aimed at a private bus carrying civilians at Kebithigollewa killing at least 64 and injuring 84. Among the dead were 15 children, 2 Buddhist monks, and pregnant women going to their regular clinic and injuring 87 civilians.

On 21 July, The LTTE in an act of deliberate sabotage and savage violence, forcibly closed the water supply from the Marvil Aru sluice gate, denying water to 15,000 families and 30,000 acres of paddy, depriving a population of over 60,000 of their livelihood and sustenance. Many children were denied access to schools.

On 02 August, LTTE infiltrators launched an attack on Muttur. Shelling and artillery fire by the LTTE killed civilians and displaced 53,000 thousand others. These people were mainly Muslims. There is no doubt that these offensives were launched by the LTTE with a view to evicting the Muslims from this area. The government, to its credit, has been able to re-settle them in their homes within a very short period.

There has been an attempted claymore bomb attack on a bus carrying civilians at Kebethigollawa, near the town of Anuradhapura yesterday. It is also reported that the LTTE in Akkarapattu in the East, attacked an STF truck at 0800 hours Sri Lanka time, injuring STF personnel.

The LTTE has also launched an attack on a Police Post at Vavuniya on the Mannar Road this morning while we talk in Geneva.

Despite these provocations the GoSL delegation as instructed by H.E the President has decided to continue the dialogue.

I wish to emphasize to the LTTE not to consider our commitment to the peace process as a sign of weakness – but as a reflection of our strong commitment and belief in peace for all the people in Sri Lanka and in particular for the people in the North and East.

In the face of almost daily provocations, the Government Security Forces have exercised utmost restraint. By doing so, the Government demonstrated its commitment to peace and encouraged an atmosphere that would lead to peace negotiations. It was in the face of repeated attacks by the LTTE by way of claymore mines, artillery fire and killings that the Government was compelled to engage in limited defensive operations in the interests of security.

III. Democracy

As we expressed in the Opening Statement of the last round of talks, the Government is deeply concerned with ensuring that each citizen of Sri Lanka is able to enjoy the benefits of a democratic society, where their rights are respected and they can pursue their occupations and develop their communities. Unfortunately, this is not the reality today. In

certain areas of the North and the East, due to the actions of the LTTE, it is well known that individuals are denied their basic democratic rights. Individuals are denied the right to express their opinions, to elect their leaders, to live their lives freely. Academics are threatened and murdered for being independent in their thinking. We should move beyond the current situation of denial and forge a positive outcome in the interest of the people of the North and the East.

As we all know, the majority of Tamil people, approximately 54%, live outside the areas where the LTTE is dominant. The majority of the people who live in the uncleared areas undergo untold deprivations. Unfortunately, such people are further victimized by the denial of their civil and political rights, by the imposition of unconscionable levies and other forms of extortion, and by subjection to inhumane punishments for expressing dissent. These reasons underlie the preference expressed by the majority of the Tamils to live in government-controlled areas and is evidence of their utter dissatisfaction with the LTTE.

To address this situation, the Government of Sri Lanka believes it is essential that certain normalization steps should be taken in the context of the peace process:

First, political parties should be given free access to all parts of Sri Lanka, which include the uncleared areas as well as the Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts. They should be able to campaign, express dissent, have offices, and operate free of intimidation, threats, and violence.

Second, democratic institutions should be allowed to function freely and without interference. This includes all offices of the Government of Sri Lanka, including its judicial and law enforcement institutions.

Third a single mechanism of law and order should be able to function throughout the country, in order to effectively enforce laws and prosecute criminals. This requires providing access to the Police personnel to certain areas, which are currently denied to them, such as the districts of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi.

Fourth the groundwork for full democratization of the North and East must be laid. All levels of society, from political leaders to students, could be involved in a process of exploration and discussion, the concept of free expression, on the substantive issues surrounding democracy, including issues of devolution and power-sharing.

These tasks have to be undertaken by us. These initial ideas of the Government could be further explored and developed during our discussions here this weekend. The Government of Sri Lanka attaches utmost priority to this issue because ultimately, achieving an honorable peace requires strengthening the democratic norms and processes in the North and the East. In this context, the Government is happy to note the fact that certain LTTE groups contested the local government elections and entered the democratic processes in the Trincomalee District, Batticalao District and in the Wanni. We hope that this trend will progress so that the LTTE leadership could continue to move into the

democratic mainstream. We are also delighted that many groups who had formerly resorted to arms are now part of the democratic process.

IV. Human Rights- Initiatives by the Government

It is the government's wish that the global principles of human rights will be established in the East and the North as well. The government acknowledges that the situation in the South needs improvement in certain respects and all measures are being implemented to achieve this. As a developing country, although our resources are limited, we will take all possible measures to ensure that the highest standards are achieved.

A Ministry of Human Rights and Disaster Management has been established for the first time.

The following steps have also been taken.

1. The Standing Committee on Human Rights to deal with allegations of human rights violations by the Police and Armed Forces and to provide policy guidance to the GOSL on various human rights issues has been reconvened.
2. An Inter-ministerial Committee on Human Rights chaired by the Minister of Human Rights and Disaster Management which meets monthly together with senior officials from the Police and Armed Forces and all relevant Ministries has been formed. The Terms of Reference for the Committee encompass a multi-dimensional reach to include regular consultations with the above agencies as well as civil society, international agencies and national human rights institutions, in a concerted effort to meet problems and arrive at effective resolutions
3. A firm commitment exists in ensuring that the language policy is properly implemented.
4. The Committee is in the process of looking into the proper implementation of the language policy to ensure that the Tamil speaking people are able to enjoy their constitutional rights in a practical sense.
5. The needs of IDP's are being met with a comprehensive memorandum of understanding signed between the GOSL and UNHCR in order to implement effective strategies and confidence building measures between communities.
6. The Government has further shown its commitment to upholding human rights and the rule of law by appointing a Special Commission to look into abductions and killings in the country. It is in the process of setting up a Commission of Inquiry to Investigate serious violations of human rights and also the setting up of an International Group of Eminent Persons who will act as Observers of the Commission.
7. Recently the Government initiated regular consultations between relevant government Ministries and agencies and INGO's and NGO's working in the North and the East in particular in order to alleviate problems and facilitate their work in these areas in order to ensure that the needs and rights of the civilian population are met.

8. The government has supplied Jaffna with over 18,000 tons of food and other supplies by ship though the LTTE has refused to assure the safety of the ships. If the LTTE agrees to assure the safety of food ships, much larger quantities could be sent quicker and efficiently under the ICRC flag.
9. The districts of Killinochi and Mullativu have been supplied with adequate supplies of food and medicine. There are no shortages.
10. While the government wishes to supply Jaffna also with all its needs, due to the wanton denial by the LTTE of security assurances and other acts of violence this cannot be achieved.

Human Rights Issues In the North and the East

The Government has serious concerns in relation to the human rights situation in the North and East.

In certain areas dominated by the LTTE, human rights are flagrantly violated. These violations have been extensively documented by numerous international organizations and foreign governments. Human rights violations include the denial of the rights to personal liberty and due process of law; to freedom of thought, expression, organization, and movement and to freedom from discrimination. It is a sad fact that four years of a ceasefire have not helped the people living in these areas to make any progress toward realizing their rights. Children continue to be recruited for armed combat and UNICEF statistics as of September 2006 indicate that 5769 cases of known underage recruitment have taken place since 1994 LTTE.

It is also highly distressing that the LTTE is continuing its fund-raising activities through extortion and intimidation chiefly to procure weapons- not only in overseas locations such as Canada, Europe and other Western countries, but also among Tamil people in the South of Sri Lanka. The recent Human Rights Watch report (Vol. 18 No.1 ©) documents these nefarious activities. A continuous stream of complaints is also being received about such activities aimed at Tamil citizens living in the South, and the amounts involved in these acts of extortion and ransome are staggering. It is strange that the LTTE is so keen to stifle the activities of the Tamil business community. Once again we reiterate that these issues must be seriously addressed in our talks.

V. Humanitarian Considerations

a) Security

The Government has also on many occasions escorted and provided humanitarian assistance to LTTE cadres, including the evacuation of sick persons.

b) Government Assistance to IDP's

The Government has consistently discharged its responsibilities towards internally displaced persons, although many are the result of the violence inflicted by the LTTE.

The IDP's have essentially been the result of LTTE attacks near civilian centers, sometimes based on ethnic considerations. On other occasions civilians have been used as convenient shields by the LTTE for their violent acts including in Muttur and Vakarai as has been pointed out by the SLMM. The government, recognizing its responsibilities, provides extensive assistance and protection to all internally displaced persons.

It readily facilitates the work of international and domestic humanitarian organizations engaged in assisting the IDPs.

The government has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the UNHCR in September 2006 on Guidelines on Confidence Building and Stabilization Measures for IDPs in the North and East, based on the UNHCR's mandate in Sri Lanka. It is the Government's intention that these Guidelines will lead to a specific, results – oriented programme of action that can be effectively and efficiently implemented.

The government has adopted a national framework for relief, rehabilitation, and reconciliation (RRR) based in part on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Its objectives are to help strengthen the Government's capacity 1) to ensure that the basic needs of people affected by the conflict are met. 2) To build productive means of livelihoods, and 3) to facilitate reconciliation across ethnic lines. Considerable success has been achieved in pursuing these policies.

The Government, in ensuring the continued supply of food and other forms of humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced persons living in uncleared areas, has created an unique precedent in the annals of conflict. Sri Lanka appears to be the only country in the world that accepts responsibility to feed its displaced citizens wherever located despite evidence that some of the food and medical supplies are being siphoned off by the LTTE.

The district and sub-district administrative offices functioning in uncleared areas are funded by the Government – this includes the salaries of Government Agents, Divisional Secretaries, Grama Niladaris and administrative staff.

The Government provides these services and amenities from revenue collected from the public in the rest of the country as the revenue from the North and the East at present is less than 0.1% of the total revenue of the country.

In the latest figures on ongoing projects in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, which include both tsunami and non-tsunami projects, there has been a total allocation of US\$ 1283.10 Million comprising loans US\$ 673.8 Million and grants US \$ 609.3 Million.

More than 50% of the foreign funded projects are based on loans granted by international institutions and foreign governments to the Government of Sri Lanka, which is then required to repay these loans. It is the Government that bears the burden of funding the development of the North and the East and repaying these borrowed funds.

c) Language Policy

The GoSL has taken a number of initiatives to implement the official language policy. As outlined **The Policy Statement of H.E. President Mahinda Rajapaksa** made on 25 November 2005 at the Ceremonial Opening of Parliament.

1. A three-year crash program will be launched to expedite the full implementation of the official language policy in police stations, government offices and other public places and minimize obstacles that Tamil-speaking people face when dealing with the state organizations.
2. Presidential Directive dated July 7, 2006 requires police officers to strictly comply with the instructions that a statement of a person arrested should be recorded in the language of his/her choice. Special units will be set up in all police stations to enable to people to make complaints in their own language without fear or suspicion. A decision has been taken to enlist the services of former public servants and civil society members in police stations, which do not have translation facilities in both official languages.
3. With regard to the salient issue of the bilingualization of staff grades in the public service, a Sub Committee consisting of the Chairman Public Administration, Secretary Ministry of Justice and National Integration, Commissioner-Language Commission meets regularly to submit recommendations to the Cabinet. All public servants will be required to acquire a working level of proficiency in Tamil.
4. A proposal for a National Institute for Language Teaching and Training has been presented to Cabinet on 25th October 2006 and is being implemented.
5. Arrangements have been made for the Ministry for Human Rights to carry out a nationwide audit on the implementation of the Official Language Policy in order to assess shortcomings and address them accordingly.

VI. Transgressions by the LTTE

Iranamadu

We now possess very clear evidence that the LTTE is continuing to improve and expand an illegal and clandestine airstrip in Iranamadu and construct two other airstrips in Mullativu. So far, the LTTE has not permitted the SLMM or the Government of Sri Lanka to officially inspect these premises or take steps to dismantle these facilities. As a Sovereign nation, we have obligations towards the international community and the discharge of such obligations would be seriously compromised if facilities of this nature were allowed to remain in the hands of terrorist organizations such as the LTTE. We are firmly of the view that these illegal facilities are being established with the intention of perpetrating acts of violence, and may well be used to destabilize our entire region. Hence, it is not a matter that could be treated lightly and in the interests of all concerned it is vital that this facility be dismantled forthwith.

We would caution that such illegal facilities, which has been established contrary to

international regulations, be dismantled before any serious harm is caused. In the past, the LTTE has been known to have recklessly carried out acts of violent aggression in our region, affecting the interests of foreign states not involved in the conflict, including the assassination of a former Prime Minister of India, publicly acknowledged by the LTTE, and the destruction of a Chinese vessel with death and injury to its crew. Therefore, we wish to treat this violation with extreme seriousness by reason of its far-reaching nature. These must be immediately dismantled.

Recruitment and Abduction of Children

The LTTE also continues to engage in violent acts against civilians, including the recruitment and abduction of children. According to SLMM figures, the majority of ceasefire violations committed by the LTTE are acts committed against civilians; most of these constitute human rights abuses. The high numbers of human rights violations that take place, without any corresponding sanctions or punishments against the perpetrators, creates a climate where the violations would continue to increase rather than decrease. We would urge the international community to take greater note of the magnitude and gravity of this situation and to encourage the LTTE to cease perpetrating these abuses. Let us all be conscious of the fact that the victims of these abuses are our own citizens and fellow human beings whose basic rights are being violated.

Of particular concern to the Government of Sri Lanka is the recruitment and abduction of children to be used as child soldiers. We discussed this grave issue during our last meeting in Geneva but could not conclude our discussion on the matter. The Government believes it is important to take up this question at this round of talks as well. It was clear from our discussions in February, supplemented by the contribution made by the Head of the SLMM, that the recruitment and abduction of children constitute serious violations of human rights. In response, to our concerns Mr. Balasingham stated that the LTTE would take all measures to completely stop the recruitment of underage children and that the LTTE would cooperate with UNICEF and other international humanitarian agencies to ensure that children are not in any way involved in this armed conflict.

Yet in the past months, this pledge has been utterly disregarded. Underage recruitment has continued unabated. The number of children known to UNICEF that have been recruited by the LTTE between February to September 2006 is recorded at 397.

In fact, only a few days after the February 2006 meeting in Geneva, several children escaped from the LTTE and described the oppressive conditions that thousands of children have been forced to endure as soldiers. The most recent UNICEF report states that since the beginning of the ceasefire through the end of September 2006, there have been 5769 children, known to UNICEF, that have been recruited into the LTTE ranks.

Another serious concern of the Government is the nonchalant manner with which the LTTE disregarded the pledges and promises it has made on the issue of child soldiers. The LTTE has cited the Action Plan for Children Affected by War as evidence that it is cooperating with UNICEF on releasing children in their ranks. Yet the most recent

Progress Report on the Action Plan states conclusively that the LTTE has dishonored the commitments it had undertaken in relation to the release and rehabilitation of children. The LTTE's repeated empty assurances and promises cast serious doubt on the sincerity of the LTTE in fulfilling the commitments it undertakes.

Child recruitment has been condemned by the UN Security Council under Resolution 1612 (2005). The LTTE has been included in Annex 11 of the Resolution, which lists parties that recruit or use children in Situations of armed conflict. The annex also states that the LTTE has been responsible for the abduction of children. The UNSC resolution 1612 draws attention to include the protection of children in armed conflict as an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict.

In any civilized society, even the kidnapping of a single child is viewed with horror and tremendous revulsion. The fact that the LTTE has been able to abduct and recruit more than 5000 children, according to the UNICEF figures, and yet not be subjected to any sanctions, is a sad reflection on the languid state of the international conscience. It is therefore time for us to make progress to ensure that this practice is discontinued.

VII. Development

The ceasefire should have ideally created conditions for the rapid development of all parts of the country. Economic development requires, the essential right of access. Unfortunately, access to certain parts of the North and the East is still being denied and thus the people are deprived of benefits of such development. The LTTE, by denying physical access to areas, which they dominate, such as the districts of Killinochchi and Mullaitivu, are depriving the people of these areas the opportunity of enjoying the benefits of development. In addition the LTTE's intransigence has prevented the government from using its capacity to assist people living in areas affected by the Tsunami. The massive levies that are illegally imposed on economic activity have also led to a stifling of the economic growth. These and other restrictive measures have to be discontinued if economic development is to progress.

Despite all these obstacles and impediments an overwhelmingly substantial part of the humanitarian and infrastructural needs of the civilian population of the North and East, including conflict areas are currently met by the Government of Sri Lanka. Some assistance from the donor community is also available. The administrative machinery and infrastructure facilities in conflict areas are continuing to be maintained by the Government despite these difficulties.

State hospitals and State run health care centers provide a totally free service – both preventative and curative and are funded by the Government. The State meets the recurrent costs of Doctors' salaries, drugs, dressings and maintenance of hospitals. In the North and East, there are over 53 Hospital institutions with more than 4427 hospital beds providing free curative healthcare.

The State funds the education system, including schools, non-formal education

institutions, and technical colleges and provides free education. The salaries of teachers, administrative, clerical and elementary staff are met by state funds. There are no private schools in operation in Kilinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Ampara and Trincomalee. School children in these areas are entirely dependent on Government run schools for their primary and secondary education, which the Government continues to provide.

There are an estimated 1848 functioning state funded schools with over 700,000 students. These schools include 411 in Jaffna, 94 in Kilinochchi, 93 in Mannar, 187 in Vavuniya, 102 in Mullativu, 314 in Batticaloa, 388 in Ampara and 259 in Trincomalee. Thus 18.9% of the schools administered by the Ministry of Education are located in the North and East.

The Government of Sri Lanka is presently taking all steps to provide the essential services that people need in the uncleared areas. In fact, even today the Government Agents in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu are actively delivering all essential services. The salaries and pensions and other expenses of these services are fully met by the Government, and the Government also monitors these activities to ensure that the services reach the people as extensively as possible. However, given the hazardous ground conditions that prevail in these areas it is necessary for the LTTE to cooperate closely to ensure that these efforts are made more effective. Already, massive programs for housing, roads, bridges, electrification, livelihood development, hospitals, and schools have been planned. The completed projects and other projects in progress and in the pipeline are valued at approximately 1,250 Million U.S. Dollars. This is a massive sum, and the investment of such an amount would need stable ground and safe conditions that are essential for the effective realization of the benefits of this vast investment.

In this context, the Government of Sri Lanka would very much desire to work with all interested parties, to ensure that people in all parts of the North and East have access to the improvements described here, and also to address the problems of those affected by the tsunami.

In relation to development, another serious issue is that many of the Muslim persons who were forcibly evicted from the North and the East by the LTTE have not yet been able to return to their legitimate places of residence to undertake their regular economic activity and this, too, needs to be addressed at a very early date.

VIII. Conclusion

The Government is committed to giving the highest priority to launching a reinvigorated peace process to usher in a sustainable peace, which will provide a lasting solution to the country's national question. The political solution needs to be based on a consensus reached through dialogue among all parties. The primary aim is to end the decades of conflict and internal strife and to build a state that upholds the aspirations and rights of all sections of our society.

The Government hopes that these talks will be the beginning of a productive dialogue and

a fruitful exchange of views with all persons concerned on the many substantive issues relating to this conflict that has taken a massive toll on the people of the country.

Foremost among these issues are the restoration of democracy, political pluralism, meaningful devolution, human rights and economic development.

The task of securing a durable and lasting peace is indeed a complex and a difficult one. It is also a dynamic process which calls for the development of innovative approaches, responsive initiatives and viable procedures and processes in order to provide remedies for existing anomalies underlying a deep rooted conflict.

The successful resolution of these problems would primarily depend on whether and how we could put an end to the destructive violence that has plagued our country for decades. Secondly, on how effectively we could proceed to the stage of constructive social engagement that will help to create the necessary infrastructure that will help to underpin and safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka to enable the restoration of amity and goodwill among all sections of our People in order that they may inherit and enjoy the immeasurable happiness and benefits of peace. The Government of Sri Lanka, consistent with the Mahinda Chintanaya, extends the hand of friendship to the LTTE and invites them to renounce the path of violence, enter the democratic process and join the political mainstream and help the long-suffering People of our Country, belonging to all ethnic groups, to end their misery and enable them to live fulfilling lives.

H.E the President, Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse has said clearly that he will go the extra mile in search of peace – a dignified and honorable peace. Where a Sri Lankan model of devolution will be devised for an undivided country to address the root causes of this conflict. It will also be a model, which will be consistent with regional geo-political realities.
