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## Press Release

### Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath Addresses 58th UNHRC Session

Hon. Vijitha Herath, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, delivered a statement at the High-Level Segment of the 58th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

In his address, Minister Herath reaffirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to human rights, reconciliation, and sustainable development, highlighting the country's progress and government's strategies for continued engagement with the international community.

Minister Herath's speech is attached.

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**Address by Hon. Vijitha Herath, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka  
58<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Human Rights Council  
High-level Segment**

Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you on your election as the President of this Council.

At the Presidential and Parliamentary elections held a few months ago, the people of Sri Lanka took a progressive decision to elect a new government with a strong mandate to direct the country towards economic, social and political transformation. The results of these elections held in November 2024 bears special significance on several fronts. It reflected a collective and unified voice from people of all regions of the country – North, South, East, West – and of all ethnicities and religions, in support of change and positive transformation. The current Parliament which was formed after the election is one of the most inclusive in our history, with a record number of women, representatives of different communities including two women from the Malayaga community and a visually impaired person being part of the Legislature of the country. This inclusivity represents Sri Lanka's new path focused on upholding the rights of all its people irrespective of differences based on gender, ethnicity or other grounds.

I would like to quote from the speech delivered by our President, Anura Kumara Disanayake, at the inauguration of the first session of the Tenth Parliament: "Elections create a contract between the people and us. This bond is formed when we present our policy statements and ideas, outlining how the country's future should be shaped. People who place their trust in these ideas cast their votes for us. With their votes, the people have fulfilled their part in this relationship by granting us the mandate to govern. Now, it is our turn to fulfil our part by serving the people."

In 2022, Sri Lanka went through its deepest and most complex social, economic and political crisis since independence. As you know, the impact of the economic crisis gave rise to a humanitarian situation affecting all segments of the population, especially the poorest and the most vulnerable segments of the society. The Government led by President Anura Kumara Disanayake has emerged successful in stabilizing the economy, and we are currently in the process of laying the foundation toward economic transformation and greater economic democratization through fair distribution of opportunities. We are acutely aware of the continuing impact of the economic challenges on our people, particularly the most vulnerable, and the government continues to take decisive steps to advance the economic and social rights of the people. In the National Budget for 2025 presented to the Parliament last week, we have committed to take series of measures to extend much needed relief and empowerment to the people including increased allocation for social welfare and security. Significantly, the budget proposals have also made historic allocations for health and education and provide for a series of empowerment measures to vulnerable groups such as women, children including orphaned, disabled or autistic children, estate sector population, students, persons with disabilities and people living in conflict affected or under-developed areas of the country.

Special attention has been paid to improving the socio-economic conditions and address critical needs such as resettlement, housing, compensation and infrastructure development in the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern Provinces.

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.

With the launch of the “Clean Sri Lanka” project by H.E. the President on 01 January 2025, the Government has taken steps to introduce a new political culture and commitment to moral and ethical governance. The ‘Clean Sri Lanka’ programme is a holistic undertaking aimed at nationwide efforts of environmental, social, and governance initiatives to bring about change, integration, and collaboration, in environment, social and governance structures.

In line with the mandate given by the people, the Government will prioritize integrity and addressing issues of mismanagement and corruption that were at the root of the economic collapse, in taking our country towards sustainable development. Through digital transformation of government structures at all levels, we hope to ensure that inefficiency and corruption will be minimized.

The Government led by President Anura Kumara Disanayaka is firmly and sincerely committed to working towards a unified Sri Lanka that respects and celebrates the diversity of its people with no division or discrimination based on race, religion, class and caste. We will not leave room for a resurgence of divisive racism or religious extremism in our country. The fundamental and longstanding principles of democracy and freedom enshrined in our Constitution will be fully respected and safeguarded while protecting the human rights of all citizens. Every citizen should feel free to practice their religion, speak their language, and live according to their cultural values without fear or discrimination. No one should feel that their beliefs, culture, or political affiliations will make them targets of undue pressure or prejudice. Administrative, political and electoral processes will be activated towards this end.

The Government has pledged to take tangible steps in the interest of further advancing national unity and reconciliation. The President has proposed to declare a Sri Lanka Day, in line with our vision for a reconciled Sri Lanka and commitment to bridging gaps between communities. We will ensure that the domestic mechanisms and processes established to address challenges emanating from the conflict will continue their work in an independent and credible manner within the Constitutional framework. Domestic institutions such as the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), Office for Reparations, and Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) will be strengthened.

The contours of a truth and reconciliation framework, will be further discussed with the broadest possible cross section of stakeholders, before operationalization to ensure a process that has the trust of all Sri Lankans. Our aim is to make the domestic mechanisms credible and sound within the constitutional framework. This will include strengthening the work towards a truth and

reconciliation commission empowered to investigate acts of violence caused by racism and religious extremism that give rise to tensions within Sri Lankan society.

A number of confidence building measures have also been taken in the last few months towards reconciliation. In November 2024, a number of roads in the Northern Province including the Palali- Achchuveli main road were opened for public use after several decades. The President, during his visit to the North in January this year, made an open invitation to Tamil-speaking youth to be part of Sri Lanka's police service. The 2025 budget includes significant allocations to upgrade the libraries throughout the country, including the historical Jaffna library which is a symbol of education and enlightenment for the Tamil community.

The Government is fully cognizant of the responsibility that accompanies the people's mandate, including the people of the Northern and Eastern provinces, to fulfill their aspirations for a just, fair and prosperous society for all our citizens. As we move forward on our path towards national unity and reconciliation and inclusive development, the continued encouragement and support of the international community will be important.

Sri Lanka is an active member of the United Nations since 1955. We are a State Party to all the 09 core UN human rights instruments and engage with Treaty Bodies and regular mechanisms of this Council on a regular basis. In the past few years, we have received over 10 Special Procedures and engaged productively with Treaty Bodies, most recently with the CEDAW Committee, ICCPR and the Universal Periodic Review process. We are committed to genuine dialogue and cooperation in human rights through continuous and constructive engagement.

Conflict, inequality, and extreme climatic conditions are driving millions into poverty daily, while countless men, women, and children continue to suffer or perish in wars across the globe. Addressing these critical challenges is essential to protect human rights and safeguard our planet for future generations.

Sri Lanka stands ready to support the Human Rights Council in addressing these pressing global challenges in a balanced and holistic manner in line with its founding principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity. We believe that States must be encouraged and empowered to address their challenges through robust national human rights frameworks, supplemented by assistance upon request. .

As a nation on the trajectory towards people-led and people-centric national transformation and as a responsible member of the international community, Sri Lanka will continue to work in a constructive spirit of dialogue and cooperation with the members of the United Nations including this Council within our national legal framework.

Thank you.