

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Eelam Tamil youth do not consider themselves to be a minority in Sri Lanka, but rather to be members of a nation under occupation. Nevertheless, while the international community considers these youth to belong to an ethnolinguistic minority, their rights as such must be protected.

We note, as well, that representatives of the Vedda people of Sri Lanka have asked for recognition as a separate minority community. Vedda youth face barriers to accessing education and employment. It is often noted that their culture risks extinction, given the pressure they face to learn non-Vedda languages in order to participate in daily life and education.

Eelam Tamil youth hold enormous potential to be agents of change, peace, and stability – whether they are Hindu, Muslim or Christian; whether they live in the North and East of Sri Lanka, in the South, or in the Diaspora. Their power to be agents of peace and stability lies in their ability to live freely and to determine their political destinies for themselves.

Many Eelam Tamil youth continue to lack access to adequate educational facilities, particularly among young Tamil women. This is in part due to the fact that the pace of return of land, requisitioned by the military, is slow: and militarization of historically Tamil areas continues to increase.

Mr. Chair, as the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order notes, in his report to the UN General Assembly (A/69/272): the international community must acknowledge that permitting the free exercise of the right to self-determination is an effective conflict-prevention strategy. All peoples, including Eelam Tamil youth, should have access to international mechanisms which operationalize the effective exercise of their right to self-determination, in the realization of their rights under the UN Charter and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.