



**Statement by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
6<sup>th</sup> session of the Forum on Minority Issues, 26-27 November 2013**

***“Beyond freedom of religion or belief: Guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities”***

Madam Chair,

My delegation congratulates you on your appointment as Chair of the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the Forum on Minority Issues. We welcome the unique opportunity provided by this Forum for engagement and dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, on guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities.

Sri Lanka has a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural social fabric and the different communities have co-existed in the country for centuries. It must be emphasized that Sri Lanka's constitution recognises the nation's communal and religious diversity and enshrines all the fundamental human freedoms that the global community strives to uphold, which are firmly rooted in the provision that no citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any such grounds.

Each and every person in Sri Lanka, be he from the religious majority or a religious minority, has been constitutionally guaranteed the freedom to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching, either by himself or in association with others, in public or in private.

The Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs has under its purview separate departments dedicated to the different religions practiced in Sri Lanka - Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. These departments have the responsibility to look after the preservation, promotion and propagation of the respective religion.

Religious holidays of all the religions are observed throughout the country. All communities have the freedom to celebrate religious events, to engage in festivities and organise religious processions in observance their beliefs.

With the defeat of terrorism and the ushering in of a new era of peace over four years ago, the Government of Sri Lanka has placed post-conflict reconciliation and rebuilding at the top of its agenda in line with the National Plan of Action for the Implementation of the recommendations of the LLRC. We take pride in many of the achievements in the short span of four years since the end of the conflict in many areas.

The National Action Plan contains many recommendations that seek to promote religious tolerance and inter-communal and inter-religious understanding as well as to address grievances and grant redress to those whose rights have been violated

on ethnic or religious grounds. In line with the recommendations, the Government has granted compensation to places of religious worship and is also rebuilding those places of worship of all religions that were destroyed during the conflict period.

We are mindful of the many challenges in creating an integrally pluralistic society after a three decade long conflict that had taken its toll on the population of an entire country.

Existing provisions in the Penal Code and the ICCPR Act criminalise hate speech and steps are underway to further strengthen the law against hate speech through a new amendment. Under the proposed amendment, any person who by words either spoken or intended to be read or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise causes or intends to cause commission of acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony or feeling of ill-will or hostility between different communities or racial or religious groups will be guilty of an offence.

In conclusion, Madam, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Independent Expert for guiding the work of this Forum. We remain hopeful that the deliberations and outcomes of this Forum will further contribute to the improvement of the situation of minorities worldwide.

Thank you.