



61st Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Statement by His Excellency Sumith Dassanayake, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva

High-Level Segment 25 February 2026

Mr. President,
High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka continues its journey towards economic, social and political transformation upholding and strengthening democratic principles, ethical governance, human rights and, national unity, to build a shared vision of *“A Thriving Nation - A Beautiful Life”*.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka is emerging from a period of profound economic and social challenges through difficult yet necessary reforms. The Government has launched the “Rebuilding Sri Lanka” initiative aimed at inclusive and equitable growth and social protection, ensuring the benefits of development and progress flow to all communities across Sri Lanka. In parallel, the Government has intensified efforts in investing in digital transformation, transparency, and institutional reform.

Mr. President,

While Sri Lanka has been making steady progress through economic stabilization, we had to face yet another enormous challenges last year as a result of the devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah. We are deeply grateful to the international community including the UN agencies for the speedy humanitarian assistance and solidarity provided. This calamity reminded us about the importance of international partnerships in addressing climate-related humanitarian challenges, which increasingly intersect with the enjoyment of human rights, particularly in the developing countries.

Mr. President,

Reconciliation and national unity remain among Sri Lanka’s priorities. We are firmly committed to building a society that rejects discrimination in all its forms and manifestations.

Concrete steps are being taken to address the legacies of the past. Domestic institutions have been strengthened to address outstanding issues. The Office on Missing Persons, the Office for Reparations, and the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation have been further strengthened by allocating adequate human and financial resources. Discussions are underway to formulate a

Truth and Reconciliation Commission that has the confidence of all communities. Public consultations are also ongoing on the initial draft of “The Protection of State from Terrorism” Bill, which, upon incorporation of feedback, will lead to the eventual repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

On 8 January 2026, Sri Lanka formally ratified ILO Convention No. 190 on eliminating violence and harassment in the workplace, following approval by the Cabinet of Ministers.

In January this year, a landmark agreement was signed by the Government to increase the daily wage of plantation workers to 1,750 rupees, which is regarded as the largest wage increase in the plantation sector’s 200-year history. On 17 February 2026, Sri Lanka announced its intention to join the Global Charter for Children’s Care Reform, reaffirming its commitment to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow up in a safe and supportive family environment.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka continues to uphold its long-standing commitment to advancing human rights through nationally owned processes and domestic institutions, further strengthened by constructive international collaboration.

Last year, H.E. Volker Türk, High Commissioner for Human Rights undertook a visit to Sri Lanka from 23-26 June 2025 during which he was able to experience first-hand the momentum of change in Sri Lanka and the Government’s commitment to advancing human rights and reconciliation.

Hon. Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka has twice addressed this Council last year and reaffirmed Sri Lanka’s commitment to advancing ethical governance, national unity and reconciliation. At the last session of the HRC, while opposing external action, Sri Lanka reaffirmed its firm commitment in this regard, in the interest of guaranteeing the rights and wellbeing of its own people.

As a State Party to all core human rights treaties, in 2025, Sri Lanka engaged with CEDAW and Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED). In 2026, we will engage with the Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities on our initial report.

At the global level, we are witnessing conflicts, inequality, climate stress, and economic uncertainty eroding hard-won human rights gains worldwide. Against this backdrop, international law, multilateralism and the UN system as a whole are faced with mounting challenges. As the Council approaches its 20th Anniversary, we believe that it should remain balanced and true to its objectives and founding principles of universality, impartiality objectivity and non-selectivity.

Mr. President,

We continue to stand ready to engage with this Council, the Office of the High Commissioner and the broader international community in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect. As we advance on our path of reconciliation and reform through domestic processes, the understanding, encouragement and support of the international community is welcomed and appreciated.

Thank you.