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Observations by the Special Rapporteur on the conclusion of his second advisory visit to Sri Lanka (26 January to 1 February 2016)

GENEVA (10 February 2016) - I am grateful to the Government of Sri Lanka for undertake an advisory visit to the country (26 January to 1 February 2016) and collaboration in the course of the visit. On this occasion I met with high Government officials in Colombo and in Jaffna, with religious leaders and a wide variety of representative organizations and victims groups, and the diplomatic community. The most important during this visit, and in a sense, the main motivation for doing it at this time, has been established in order to carry out the national consultations on transitional justice. I am grateful to everyone that spent time with me. Without the support of the Office of the High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office this trip would not have been possible. I thank the United Nations for its contribution to this visit.

National Consultations

The international community –this mandate included—had insisted on the importance of national consultations, in the conviction that redressing massive human rights violations with the participation of those whose rights were violated in the first place. Consultations are crucial for several reasons: it constitutes in itself a mode of recognition and respect for rights that were violated, often in the most brutal ways, will be listened to respectfully and taken seriously as to the most effective ways of redressing those violations. Consultations are also a means of trying to guarantee a close fit between the programmes to be established and the needs and expectations of their beneficiaries; it is a way of eliciting information about violations that may not be apparent; symbolically, it is another way of reaffirming the inclusive and respectful reintegration of victims into the community of citizens, and a way to signal to the world the notion of *equal rights*.

It is therefore gratifying to see that a Task Force has been established in order to implement a national consultation on issues having to do with truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence, which are matters of legal obligation, and which are commitments voluntarily undertaken by Sri Lanka when it co-sponsored a resolution of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in September 2014.

Furthermore, it is particularly gratifying that the Government has decided to establish a task force made up entirely of representatives of civil society with a long trajectory in the field of human rights. While in choosing to appoint such a task force the Government is making clear the importance of the independence and objectivity of the consultations, the risks to the credibility of those who have accepted this appointment must also be appreciated. Everyone's credibility is at stake here. For the sake of the integrity of the exercise, but fundamentally, for the sake of the search for victims' redress, and as a consequence, for what it would say about the robustness and seriousness of the idea of equal rights for all, of a shared sense of citizenship in which the exercise must be made to work.

A difficult context

The task force is starting its deliberations, however, against a background that includes statements by the President of Sri Lanka, the Prime Minister, as well as several

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