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 both in Colombo and in Jaffna, with religious leaders and a wide variety of representatives of civil society 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 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 them for their 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 is best done with the participation of those whose rights were violated in the first place. Consulting victims is crucial for several reasons: it constitutes in itself a mode of recognition and respect; people whose rights were violated, often in the most brutal ways, will be listened to respectfully and their views taken seriously as to the most effective ways of redressing those violations. Consulting victims is a means of trying to guarantee a close fit between programmes to be established and the needs and expectations of their beneficiaries; it is a way of eliciting information about topics and issues that may not be apparent; symbolically, it is another way of reaffirming the inclusive nature of society, the reintegration of victims into the community of citizens, and a way to signal to others the currency of 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 commitments voluntarily undertaken by Sri Lanka when it co-sponsored a resolution at 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 defense of human rights. While in choosing to appoint such a task force the Government is making a bet in favor of the importance of the independence and objectivity of the consultations, the risks being taken by 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 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 Sri Lanka, this 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