



**21<sup>st</sup> Session of the HRC - Agenda Item 3**  
**Statement by Sri Lanka**  
**at the ID with SRSG on Indigenous Peoples & EMRIP**

Madam President,

The delegation of Sri Lanka welcomes the Reports of the High Commissioner on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples pursuant to HRC Resolution 18/8 adopted on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2011; of the Secretary General on Ways and Means of Promoting Participation at the UN of Indigenous People's Representatives; as well of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous People on its Fifth Session. Sri Lanka also thanks Mr. James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for his Report.

We also welcome the concerted efforts of the OHCHR to give voice to indigenous people's rights in the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms. We acknowledge the Expert Mechanism's study on the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of indigenous peoples, and the consideration of best practices and implementation strategies to attain the goals of the UN Declaration.

Being a country that is home to an indigenous community which has its roots in the Neolithic age dating from at least 16,000 BC, Sri Lanka is firmly of the view that the indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and safeguard their own identity and traditions as enshrined in the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples of 2007. Even today, the indigenous community of Sri Lanka known as the 'Vanniyaletto' or the 'Aadiwasis' retains their own distinctive, cyclic worldview, prehistoric memory, and time-tested knowledge of their forest habitat, that have enabled them to meet the diverse challenges to their collective identity and survival.

The Sri Lanka Government's policy towards its indigenous citizens and their inclusive role in the development process has taken into consideration their specific aspirations as well as their wish to preserve their cultural identity and way of life. Additionally, they enjoy all other rights enjoyed by the citizens of Sri Lanka. The Ministries of National Heritage and Arts & Cultural Affairs have launched specific programmes to protect and promote the rights of the indigenous peoples including their access to health, education, and livelihood support. The 'Jana Uruma' Museum and the 'Vedi Piyasa' Centre are repositories established to preserve the cultural heritage and the ancient medical traditions of the indigenous community.

The community, led by its chieftain Uruwarige Wannilaaththo, participates in the decision-making process through their own system of justice as well

as through a constructive dialogue with the country's political leadership, including the Head of State.

In conclusion, Madam President, Sri Lanka views positively initiatives to safeguard the rights and preserve the way of life of its indigenous community.

I thank you.

