

Sri Lanka

21



27th Session of the Human Rights Council
Agenda Item 3 and 5
Clustered ID with the SR on Indigenous Peoples and EMRIP

Mr President,

Sri Lanka takes note of the UN High Commissioner's Report on the rights of the indigenous peoples (A/HRC/27/30) and welcomes the activities of the OHCHR in this regard, including through the UN Indigenous Partnership Initiative, capacity building and guidance tools.

My delegation also takes note of the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples (A/HRC/27/52) and her work in order to uplift the standards of the UN Declaration and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Sri Lanka is of the view that the indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and safeguard their own identity and traditions as enshrined in the 2007 UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples. We also believe that the upcoming World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, scheduled to be held in September this year will further contribute to ensuring the promotion and the full application of the provisions of this important Declaration.

Mr President,

Sri Lanka is home to the indigenous "vanniyaletto" also known as the "adivasi" people, who have inhabited the country from the Neolithic age. They are recognized as citizens of the country under the Citizenship Act of 1948, and enjoy all rights and privileges enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka. While all people of Sri Lanka share a common heritage of over 2500 years, the indigenous peoples are an integral part of the diversity of Sri Lankan civilisation.

The Government has taken several considered measures to help our indigenous people to continue with their traditional lifestyle, ensure their rights and to safeguard and preserve their culture. Researchs is being carried out with the assistance of the Government on different facets of their folk culture, such as the traditional medical treatments, customs and traditional knowledge.

Considering the importance of allowing the 'adivasi' community to continue with their lifestyle, the Government has distributed State lands among the indigenous people under various Government projects. Further, the Government has implemented many development projects aimed at protecting and promoting the heritage of this group of indigenous people, and to develop their livelihoods. The reconstruction of two tanks "Pudalugas Amuna" and "Kotabakiniya Weva" continues to ensure their access to water, the construction of an open air theatre in "Dambana" facilitates the cultural activities and rituals of the indigenous peoples. Housing projects have also been implemented to provide them shelter, and necessary assistance to with their agrarian practises. The Government also provides financial assistance in the maintenance of the Indigenous Folk Heritage.

The 'adivasi' community conducts an annual meeting under the auspices of the Government called 'variga sabha', headed by their community leader to collectively address issues and challenges faced by them.

The "vanniyaletto", the indigenous peoples in Sri Lanka, is by no means an isolated community, with their access to free education and health. While maintaining their unique identity, they also contribute to enrich the vibrant socio-cultural and religious traditions of the country, such as participating in the annual Dalada Poojawa at the Temple of Tooth Relic, a World UNESCO heritage.

In conclusion Mr President,

The community, led by its chieftain participated in the decision-making process through their own system of justice, as through a constructive dialogue with the country's political leadership. The Government will continue its commitment to protect the cultural heritage and the traditional lifestyle of this community.

Thank you.

