



A D D R E S S

by

**Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe
Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights
of Sri Lanka**

**at the First Session of the
Human Rights Council - Geneva**

19 June 2006

**Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the
United Nations, Geneva**

(check against delivery)

**Mr. President,
Excellencies,
High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Distinguished delegates,**

On behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, and on my own behalf, may I congratulate you Mr. President on your election to the Chair of this historic inaugural session of the UN Human Rights Council. I would like to assure you my delegation's support and cooperation as you undertake the onerous task of presiding over the deliberations of this august body.

Mr. President,

Today is a historic day for all those who have worked relentlessly during the past several years to make the UN human rights machinery more responsive, accountable and able to heed the voices and sentiments of the countless numbers of the aggrieved more effectively and to act more decisively. The international community stands on the threshold of a new beginning today in the global campaign for the promotion and protection of human rights, one of the central missions of the United Nations.

We hope that the creation of this new body will usher all of us from "an era of declaration" to "an era of implementation" where the promotion and protection of human rights become a cross-cutting and integrated item of all our activities, whether they relate to development, security, conflict resolution, peace-building or peace-keeping. No State – whether that State is a member of this Council or not - can be oblivious to the widening ramifications and consequences of human rights violations, which affect the very foundations of democracy, peace and stability and sustainable development.

This new era therefore should in large measure focus on the further implementation of norms and standards that have been established during the past six decades through further strengthening of national institutions and frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights, all over the world.

Mr. President,

As a small developing nation and a vibrant democracy in Asia, Sri Lanka was heartened and humbled by the vote of confidence bestowed on us by the international community, in electing us to the Human Rights Council. We pledge our continued commitment and constructive engagement to enable this Council to carry out its mandate – as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 60/251 – "to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner".