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United Nations Human Rights Council gives Sri Lanka two more years

By Dharisha Bastians in Geneva (FT.LK) - The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on Sri Lanka for the fifth time yesterday, but the Government will claim a diplomatic victory after it won a two-year extended timeline to establish mechanisms that will deliver justice to thousands of victims and reconcile a country torn apart by a civil war that spanned three decades.

extended timeline for the Government of Sri Lanka to tackle its commitments on post-war reconciliation and allegations of war crimes laid out in the 2015 UNHRC resolution.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Harsha De Silva, who is leading the Government delegation in Geneva, expressed Sri Lanka's appreciation to the council and its member states for the understanding and support for Sri Lanka's

processes for promoting reconciliation, justice and human rights.

"We thank them for placing their faith in our Government, and our people, and for walking with us at our side, as we strive to establish Sri Lankan Government-led processes with international assistance, engagement and support for the benefit of all our citizens," the Deputy Minister said, delivering the statement of the country concerned shortly before the resolution was adopted last

afternoon.

The United States, the main protagonist of Sri Lanka resolutions at the Human Rights Council, presented the draft resolution before the UNHRC yesterday. Sri Lanka's decision to cosponsor the resolution at the UNHRC 34th Session was testament to the Sirisena administration's positive engagement with the international community and its commitment to reconciliation and human rights,

said US Head of Delegation, William J. Mozdzier. The US said it hoped the resolution adopted at the session yesterday would ensure the non-recurrence of conflict and strengthen democracy in the island.

The US was joined by the core group of sponsors - UK, Macedonia and Montenegro - and 36 core sponsors, including Sri Lanka.

Addressing the council, the UK's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Julian Braithwaite recalled the historic moment in 2015 when the UNHRC adopted the first Sri Lanka resolution by consensus, after years of divisions. Sri Lanka had taken national ownership by cosponsoring the 2015 resolution, Braithwaite noted. The UK urged the Sri Lankan Government to come up with a "time bound implementation strategy" to fulfill its outstanding commitments as laid out in the 2015 resolution.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights also informed the Human Rights Council yesterday that the office would require funds of up to \$ 362,000 to implement the Sri Lanka resolution. According to the Programme Budgetary Implications attached to the Sri Lanka resolution as submitted by the OHCHR, the budget would go towards six missions to Sri Lanka by OHCHR Geneva-based staff, local transportation, security and communications during field missions, the recruitment of temporary staff and conference and translation facilities for the two reports due before the Human Rights Council.

The new resolution calls on Sri Lanka to "fully implement" measures that are outstanding from the 2015 resolution.

UNHRC Resolution 30/1 of October 2015 recommended the establishment of truth-seeking and reparations mechanisms and a special court to

*** Resolution adopted without a vote at UNHRC in Geneva**
*** US says Lanka's cosponsorship testament to Sirisena Govt.'s international engagement, commitment to reconciliation**
*** Harsha thanks member states for understanding and support**
*** OHCHR needs \$ 362,000 to implement Lanka resolution in 2018-2019**



Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Harsha de Silva at UNHRC sessions

UNHRC Resolution 34/1 titled Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka was cosponsored by the Government and adopted by the 47-member Human Rights Council currently in session in the Swiss city of Geneva. For only the second time in five years, the resolution on Sri Lanka was adopted without a vote at the council.

The March 2017 resolution provides a two-year

prosecute grave crimes committed during the final years of the conflict. It also called for broad legal and security sector reform to improve the country's human rights situation.

Sri Lanka's next major report on the progress made on implementing the 2015 resolution by the High Commissioner for Human Rights will be at the council's 40th Session in March 2019.

The draft resolution also calls for a written report from the High Commissioner at the 37th Session of the council in March 2018.

The final draft of the resolution adopted yesterday contains no significant changes from the zero draft that was circulated among member states of the council earlier this month.

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SL must come to terms with past tragedies

By Himel Kotelawala (FT.LK) - Insisting that as a sovereign state the final decision with regard to the 23 March Geneva resolution rests with Sri Lanka, Foreign Affairs Minister Mangala Samaraweera reaffirmed the Government's commitment to move

forward with the two-year extension. To this end, he said, the contours of the proposed Truth-Seeking Commission (TSC) are currently being worked out.

"The Prime Minister has been consulting different experts. They have given us the contours of such a mechanism, and one of our priorities will be to get Cabinet approval for the TSC within the next few months," Minister Samaraweera said while fielding questions from journalists at a special press briefing held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Colombo. The Government, he said, will sit down with all stakeholders and work out a road map for the next two years.

Asked if President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe were on the same page about the proposed new Constitution, Minister Samaraweera opined that a referendum was a risk worth taking though it's not as big a risk as some perceive it to be - particularly given that the ruling coalition came into power promising to "introduce a constitution that will celebrate the diversity of our country along with the entrenchment of democratic values."

"The President and Prime Minister, I'm sure, will want to honour the commitment given by us to the people," he added. Samaraweera also took the opportunity to compare and contrast the diplomatic gains made by the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration to that of the previous Government. "In Geneva, where acrimonious debates, votes and divisions used to take place over Sri Lanka in the past, the international community upheld and reaffirmed its trust and confidence in Sri Lanka to be in charge of its own reconciliation process, with no acrimonious words or votes but only praise," he said. In 2014, he recalled, only 12 countries stood by Sri Lanka when the international community decided to appoint an international investigation into Sri Lanka. "This time there was no vote, no division, no accusation, no half words. Country after country took the floor to praise the Government and the people of our country and express their support



Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera - Pic by Upul Abayasekara

Opposition lawmakers back home, Samaraweera asserted that Sri Lanka's sovereignty has not been compromised in any way.

- Truth-Seeking Commission being worked out, Cabinet approval sought
- Says Sri Lanka's sovereignty not compromised
- Sri Lanka has won the international community over
- SL Army one of the most disciplined in the world but may have black sheep
- Consultations will take place with all stakeholders
- PM and President on same page regarding new constitution
- SL must come to terms with past to move forward

for Sri Lanka," he said, adding that these countries included the five permanent UN Security Council members. Responding to criticisms made by

"There are those who say that Sri Lanka sold its soul, compromised sovereignty, cowed down to the West, because of their envy and their jealousy; but I want to state very clearly that all we have done under President Sirisena and Prime Minister

Wickremesinghe is to reassert our sovereignty and regain the lost respect for Sri Lanka among the international community," he said.

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