

Shelter programs to solve sub-standard housing

Address made by the Mahinda Rajapakse, Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development, at the Special Session of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, Nairobi, Kenya on May 8, 2000

First of all, let me extend the warm felicitation from the H.E. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the President of Sri Lanka, and Hon. Indika Goonawardena, the Minister of Urban Development, Housing and Construction who is unable to attend this conference, as he is a serving as a member of Sri Lanka Government Team, currently holding political discussions with other parties on the proposed constitutional changes in my country. Therefore, I have been privileged to be here, as my Ministry, which is the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development, is also playing an active role in implementation of the Sri Lanka Programme on HABITAT Agenda, particularly addressing the housing issue of the fisher folk in the country, which has been identified by the Government of Sri Lanka as one of the disadvantaged groups.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here to review the progress made since HABITAT II Conference held in Istanbul, June 1996, by all of us in our respective countries. Our country report examines the progress made by Sri Lanka since HABITAT II to date.

Addressing the issue of sub-standard housing is one of the most serious development challenges in the next decade. For instance 51 per cent of the Colombo's total population live in such conditions. Number of other disadvantaged groups among others including estate sector and the fishing communities need adequate housing. Number of innovative programmes have been launched by the GOSL particularly to address the shelter issue: ensuring security of tenure, right to adequate housing equal access to land, access to credit and basic services etc.

Infrastructural facilities

For and example to address shelter issue of the half of Colombo's population, an innovative, fully market based, self-financing, voluntary relocation programme with the full participation of the private sector and the community, called Sustainable Townships Programme is under implementation. In order to supplement and complement urban housing development programme within the Colombo Metropolitan Region including the City of Colombo, another programme to improve the infrastructural facilities of the Under Served Settlements is being introduced by the GOSL through enabling approach called Urban Settlements Improvement Project. Both these two options are in operating within the City of Colombo without overlapping each other. Further, the GOSL has given a ministerial status to the Estate Housing to address the housing issue of the plantation workers by targeting to build over 100,000 housing units through enabling strategies.

Also, I am personally involved in addressing the housing issue of yet another disadvantaged group, which is the fishing community. Three specific programmes are being implemented to construct over 73,000 housing units under the "Diyawara" Villages, "Diyawarapura" and the Scattered Fisheries Housing Projects implemented by my Ministry, with a view to uplift the socio-economic conditions of fishing com-

munity who desperately need adequate housing. Out of these three shelter programmes two are namely "Diyawara" Villages, and the Scattered Fisheries Housing Programme are founded on the participatory, self-help and enabling housing development approaches with access to credit on concessionary repayment basis and access to lands within their livelihood neighbourhoods. "Diyawarapura" is a direct construction housing apartments programme is to relocate the fisher families within the neighbourhoods of their livelihoods. These programs are already under implementation and nearly 20,000 households have been reached since its inception in late 1997 to date.

Housing programmes

These targeted communities will be entrusted with the shared control of the natural resources, particularly of the fisheries and aquatic resources management to harness their livelihoods, while opening the opportunities in the free-markets by venturing them to Fisher Community Based Companies as equity partners, enabling them to maintain and manage not only environments and the living neighbourhood but also the economy and the development process. I am very happy to inform this distinguished audience that these three programmes that, I am advocating namely, the "Diyawara" Villages "Diyawarapuras" and the Scattered Fisheries Housing Programmes have already received an overwhelming positive responses from the community.

52 per cent of the total housing stock of Sri Lanka is non-permanent. Therefore, provision of better housing, improving the quality of the national housing stock, ensuring security of tenure, improvements to infrastructure and creating sustainable environmental conditions are the major challenges that the economic development of Sri Lanka has to be addressed today, in addition to meet the challenges pertaining to provision of adequate housing for the aforementioned disadvantaged groups. In the light of the above, Sri Lanka has been actively involved in promoting planned physical and urban human settlement development, since 1996.

The 1998 Presidential Task Force on Housing and Urban Development has laid down the basic guidelines and directions under six major thrust areas such as: Urban development, Physical Planning, Environment, Human Settlements Development, and Water and Infrastructure Development, in compatible with the objectives of the HABITAT Agenda 21. Further the required institutional and coordination mechanisms were created to facilitate the objectives of the Presidential Task Force, removing a number of legal and institutional impediments, which caused hindrance to the fast track implementation of Sri Lanka programme on Urban and Human Settlement Development.

During the period under review, the human "Development Index Rank" of the country has reached at 91, placing Sri Lanka above many of the developing countries. As a result of the full commitment of the GOSL to ensure social development and eradication of poverty, it has achieved a remarkable success in bringing down the mortality rate of the child population under five years of age and reducing Infant Mortality Rate to 16.1 per 1,000 live births, thus achieving "Under Five Mortality Rank:

of Sri Lanka, standing at 136 in the Global context, which is best in the SAARC region. By the year 1999 the national literacy rate has reached 92% and the life expectancy at birth has reached 73 years and per capital GNP has increased to US\$ 823, while further reducing the population under National Poverty Line up to 22%.

As a result of adoption of the market economic principals and policies in the sphere of economic management, Sri Lanka today is on the verge of changing from a traditional agricultural society into a manufacturing and service sector heavy economy. As a result the participation of the non-agricultural sectors in the GDP is on the increase, which is about 78%. The annual real GDP growth of the country has been maintained at an average of 5% during 1996-1999 and the average level of investments and savings during the same period was 25% of GDP. Despite the current civil strife and high percentage of expenses for defense on one hand, and the serious set-backs suffered in the South and Far Eastern Economies on the other, Sri Lanka was able to maintain the economic stability as well as achieving some progressive results in the spheres of social and economic development.

The progress made in some selected sectors during the past five years are: the labour force participation rate increased from 66% to 70.1% employment rate increased from 5.2 to 6.1 million (of which 82% in the Private Sector), unemployment rate reduced from 14.4% to 9.1% annual total of foreign employment increased from 49,911 to average of 158,200 per annum and inflation rate has reduced from 13 to 7%.

Self-sustenance

Sri Lanka is a country with long-standing experience on Center - Periphery power sharing and administration through a well established Local Government system. A process of decentralization of further authorities from Centre to Local Authorities and thereby enabling them to become more independent and self-sustenance is under review to ensure good urban and local governance.

The GOSL has kept in focus, the role of the State in economic development, which was confined to areas where market mechanisms failed, while facilitating and guiding investment by the private sector. Policy directions on government investment emphasizes a gradual reduction in the budget deficit where the underlying strategy is aimed at reducing inflation creating productive employment opportunities, reducing poverty, increasing savings and investment and promoting private sector activities in order to place the economy on the path of rapid economic development.

Government has been successful in mobilizing and utilizing substantial volumes of foreign assistance towards the Public Investment Strategy and socio-economic development in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the annual average foreign commitment during the past five-year period is around US \$ 750 million while the annual disbursement of such commitment is around US\$ 580 million. Sri Lanka wishes to harness international cooperation and assistance for the achievements of its priority needs in the coming two decades. Mobilization of housing finance, international development, basic infrastructure provision,

development of monitoring mechanisms, human resources development, strengthening of NGOs/CBOs are some important areas identified for International Corporation.

Ladies and gentlemen, finally, let me reaffirm Sri Lanka's determination to implement the HABITAT II, Global Plan of Action by accepting the principals and commitment embodied.

in the draft Global Plan of Action, extending institutional arrangements and facilities to the UNCHS, organizing manpower training and conducting exchange programmes for regional international requirements in the years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen at last, but not at least, let me thank all those who have been involved in organizing this event for us to share our experiences, the Executive Director, the Government of Kenya and especially

His Excellency the President Dannel Arap Moi, for welcoming us to this beautiful City of Nairobi and for the hospitality extended to us from the moment we came here.

Ladies and gentlemen, as the UN have resolved for the first time ever to declare the Birth, death, and the day of enlightenment, which is called "Vesak Day" falling within next week, as the most sacred day for Buddhists to be celebrated the world over as an annual event.

Therefore, let me conclude my intervention here with these words preached by Lord Buddha 2,500 years ago: It says.

"If someone is giving food, the strength is given,

If someone is giving clothes, the glamour is given,

If someone is giving vehicles, the comfort is given,

If someone is giving light, the vision is given,

If someone is giving shelter, everything is given."