



**Statement by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka at the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 20 March 2019**

*Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka - Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/40/23)*

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates and Friends,

Our Commission welcomes, in particular, the recommendation made by the High Commissioner's report on the need to strengthen independent commissions. It is our view that the critical priority of the moment is to consolidate democratic gains made in the past three years. Those gains are still fragile and cannot be taken for granted. All anticipated progressive measures rest on the consolidation of democratic spaces that opened up in recent years.

Consequent to the passage the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 2015, the effective functioning of independent institutions contributed significantly to strengthen democracy. Therefore, serious note must be taken of recent and increasing attacks against the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the Constitutional Council it established and independent Commissions, in particular the Human Rights Commission. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment must necessarily be strengthened, not diluted.

We are pleased to note that our Commission entered into a MOU with the Office of Missing Persons to streamline collaboration between our two institutions. All other promised transitional justice institutions must be established without further delay.

While our Commission agrees with the High Commissioner's assessment of the general human rights situation in Sri Lanka, our Commission has yet to receive complaints or

information on cases of abduction, unlawful detention and sexual violence referred to at paragraph 56 of the High Commissioner's report. No entity that has made such allegations has provided our Commission with specific information sufficient to commence an inquiry. Hence, the Office of the High Commissioner must provide necessary information to inquire into these serious allegations.

Thank you.