

Oral Statement - 37th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Colombo International Financial City, formerly known as Colombo Port City
Date: March 19, 2018
Delivered by: Ms Laurence Blattmer

Thank you Mr. President,

Dominicans for Justice and Peace (OP) and Franciscans International welcome Sri Lanka's participation in the UPR. However, serious concerns remain regarding the Colombo International Financial City, formerly known as Colombo Port City. Sri Lanka's President and Prime Minister have granted their full support to this project, despite serious concerns and opposition expressed by many experts and civil society groups.¹

The insignificant efforts made to address the loss of livelihood of poor fishing communities who traditionally have depended on the sea are seriously concerning.² Sand mining and dumping activities are destroying the coral reefs. The Government now advises that fishermen buy refrigerated deep-sea vessels and expects that fishing be done at a depth of at least 55 feet into the ocean. This policy clearly favors rich businessmen who can afford the necessary equipment.

A looming hazard is the emission of toxic particles by the construction of high-rise buildings during 15 to 20 years. Toxin levels will be likely to exceed significantly the safety levels for humans and cause lung cancer and cardiovascular diseases, especially in children and the elderly. These issues have not been sufficiently mentioned in any Environmental Impact Assessment reports.³

Continuing with this project without seriously considering its adverse effects on the ecosystem and the population's concerns is a violation of numerous fundamental human rights. Despite the disappointing lack of UPR recommendations regarding Colombo International Financial City, we ask States to urge Sri Lanka to ensure that comprehensive Environmental and Human Rights Impact Assessments are carried out, to conduct a participatory and effective consultation with all stake holders, and to ensure that no health hazards result from the construction of this project.

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹ People have protested on number of occasions since the inception of this Project during the previous regime. Some examples: In Dec 2014 and in March 2015 over 300 petitions were handed to the coast conservation department, and on January 2016 to the secretaries of the President and Prime Minister. On April 2016 a protest was held at the Galle Face Green; on October 2016, a six-day protest, organized by the People's Movement against the Port City, was held by fishermen from the Coastal Fishing Trade (eight fishing villages from Kammalthota to Uswetakeiyawa). Another massive protest happened on August 2017.

² Number of fishermen directly affected: more than 30,000 in Negombo alone. Overall figure of all those engaged in associated trades: more than 600,000. Other losses of livelihood: fishermen living nearby the site of the project and in the areas where the construction materials are extracted; fishermen who live along the coastal area of Kammalthota to the Rathmalana, whose income has already been reduced due to the depletion of fish because of sand mining. The number of fishermen registered in the EIA is almost four times lower than it is in reality, according to which only 9000 fishermen are supposed to get compensation. Hence, thousands of fishermen will be deprived of their livelihoods for years.

³ An original Environment Impact Assessment was presented by the Ministry of Megapolis and the Western Development in 2011. The EIA's consultants were Lead Consultant Central Engineering. The approving agency was the Department of Coast Conservation & Coastal Resource Management Department. A Supplementary Environment Impact Assessment (SEIA) was submitted for public critique in 2016 by the same agencies. Megapolis and Western Development Minister Patali Champika Ranawaka said at a January 26, 2018 media briefing in Colombo that further environmental and social impact assessments had been completed. None of these reports have sufficiently addressed the possible consequences on the population's health living nearby the construction sites.