

The Statement

Session 1

NARAMPANAWA

of Mr. Vajira Namarapanawa, Secretary, State Ministry of Environment of Sri Lanka

at the 2nd Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, 21-22 May 2015,
UNCC, Bangkok, Thailand

Your Excellency, Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar, Vice President & Head of Department of Environment,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

Dr. Shamshad, Akhtar, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commissions for Asia and the Pacific,

First of all, Your Excellency, Dr Ebtekar, please allow me to congratulate you for your election as the Chairperson of the 2nd **Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development**. I trust in your ability to bring this meeting to successful outcomes of our deliberations.

I have the honour of addressing the 2nd Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, which is in preparation for the **High-level Political Forum** and on the verge of the big decision of the global community of defining our strategy for the **Post-2015 Development Agenda** and our path towards achieving sustainable development through adherence to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sri Lanka is embracing democracy under the leadership of our newly elected President, His Excellency, Mr. Maithreepala Sirisena, who has declared last week his commitment of adherence for safeguarding the democratic governance in Sri Lanka

and would retain his executive powers only to protect and safeguard the environment for the benefit of the present and future generations of Sri Lanka.

The new Cabinet formed by His Excellency the President is focusing on an array of social, economic and environmental protection policies, with good governance at the core and the objective to improve the livelihoods of the population at large.

The economy of Sri Lanka has enjoyed a robust annual growth at 6.5 per cent over the course of 2004 to 2013, which is an achievement compared to its regional peers. The Sri Lankan Government is seeking opportunities to achieve GDP growth of USD 4,000 per capita by 2016, while seeking avenues for going from the middle-income trap and for reducing unemployment, and in particular of young people (currently it is around 16 per cent) and low female labour engagement. In this regard, Sustainable Consumption and production policies and tools will be instrumental for creation of new engines of growth and for attracting new investments.

When economy of a developing country like Sri Lanka is rapidly growing, it often expands beyond the available natural resources necessary to sustain the long term economic growth and often the industrial and production processes are quite wasteful. At the same time, the capacity of the natural environment to purify effluents and absorb toxins reaches its limits and then collapses causing significant loss of biodiversity and life-supporting ecosystems. Sustainable Consumption and Production principles are fully embedded in the cultural traditions and lifestyle of Sri Lankan society for thousands of years. King Parakramabahu, who ruled the ancient kingdom of Sri Lanka in the early 12 century, has revered water as a sacred resource of life and has ruled that “Every drop of water needs to be collected and used before going to the sea”. Since then Sri Lanka enjoyed an elaborate water harvesting system, which is specially the cascade irrigated tank system in the Dry Zone that benefits

even the modern society and increases resilience for the adverse impacts of climate change today.

Sustainable Consumption and Production principles, policies, tools and mechanisms provide an effective framework to enhance the sustainability of the current economic system through resource efficiency and resource effectiveness.

That is why the Government of Sri Lanka sought support from the European Union for developing a national Sustainable Consumption and Production policy framework, for reviewing and strengthening the institutional set-up and capacity of government officials to support that process. And, it was granted a National Policy Support Project through the SWITCH-Asia Sustainable Consumption and Production programme and in support of the Sustainable Development Goal 12, which are expected to be adopted at the forthcoming UN General Assembly in September 2015. This makes Sri Lanka the first South-Asian country for receiving such an important support to ensure the established policy, legal and institutional framework for the nation.

M-me Chairperson,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me allow now to brief you about the achievements of Sri Lanka in support of Millennium Development Goals implementation and most importantly in a balanced and sustainable manner.

As we all know, there are 44 Millennium Development Goal indicators in total, of which 27 have clear targets. Sri Lanka has already achieved targets for 13 of these indicators and is mostly on track to meet the remainder by this year. Free education and universal health care for more than six decades have contributed to impressive results in education, health and living conditions. More recent policies and

programmes related to the Millennium Development Goals have helped accelerate progress and achieve some targets well ahead of schedule.

Sri Lanka achieved the target of halving poverty at the national level seven years before 2015. National poverty incidence declined from 26.1 percent in 1990-1991 to 6.7 percent in 2012-2013. The urban sector reached the target in 2000; the rural sector in 2008. According to the latest estimates, even the estate sector, which usually lags behind, saw the incidence of poverty fall to 10.9 percent in 2012-2013. It is on track to halve the poverty rate before the end of 2015, though inequality gaps have not been closed.

Sri Lanka has been successful in achieving all three targets related to universal primary education (MDG2). Sri Lanka has almost achieved universal primary education, and the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 is nearly 100 percent.

With reference to the Millennium Development Goal 3, Sri Lanka has almost reached gender parity in primary education with the ratio of girls to boys reaching 99.4 percent in 2012.

Sri Lanka is on track to achieve the target of reducing both the under-five and infant mortality rates by two-thirds of the level of the base year by 2015, if present trends continue.

Sri Lanka has achieved considerable success in reducing maternal mortality with maternal mortality ratio declining from 92 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 33.3 in 2010. Sri Lanka is expected to meet the target of Millennium Development Goal 5 with reducing the ratio by three-fourths over the baseline year of 1990.

It is also to be noted that Sri Lankan Government has secured free universal healthcare coverage for all citizens. Although Sri Lanka remains a low prevalence country, the number of HIV/AIDS cases are gradually increasing.

The Anti-Malaria Campaign is now working towards eliminating the disease and no malaria-related deaths since 2007.

M-me Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ensuring the Environmental Sustainability is the 7th Millennium Development Goal. In this respect Sri Lanka has reached many achievements.

Sri Lanka has met the target for the proportion of people with access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Access to safe drinking water has improved at the national level.

With regard to the total forest cover, it would have fallen from 33 percent of total land area in 1990 to 26.6 percent in 2010, if savannah forest would not have been taken into account. The savannah forest has been very stable and has experienced only marginal changes.

Goal 8 is unique, with its targets and indicators focusing more on commitments and achievements of building partnerships that would support developed countries through providing official development assistance (ODA), market access and debt relief to developing nations.

In this regards, ODA flows received as a percentage of Sri Lanka's gross national income (GNI) fell from 1.5 percent in 1997 to 1 percent in 2011. Sri Lankan imports admitted duty free into developed countries significantly declined from almost 70 percent in 2010 to 37.5 percent by 2011.

This reduction was largely owing to the loss of the GSP+ (Generalized System of Preferences), and the rate remains far below the developing country average of 80 percent, while the garments remain the key export product, constituting over 40 percent of total export earnings.

However, during the last four months there are recent developments in strengthening the partnership between the Government of Sri Lanka and the European Union, including programme for trade assistance and the EU SWITCH-Asia SCP National Policy Support Component support with aspirations on both sides for Sri Lanka to graduate to the GSP+ status.

M-me Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka is one of the pioneering countries that has been a forerunner in taking initiatives to establish policy, legal and administrative frameworks for Sustainable Development and mainstreaming environmental and social dimensions into the development arena. The **National Action Plan for Haritha (Green) Lanka Programme** was formulated by the Ministry of Environment in 2009, with the objective of addressing environmental issues in economic development, incorporating environmental dimensions into the economic development process to ensure the long term sustainability of the country, in consultation with stakeholders. The **Haritha Lanka Programme** includes 10 missions, 82 strategies and 375 actions and is currently upgraded to support implementation of the SDGs.

The High-level Policy Directive for the country is the establishment of the **National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD)** under the Chairmanship of H.E. the President with the membership of all key ministers, which is the apex body on decision-making and coordination for achieving Sustainable Development.

In addition, many innovative programmes are implemented at various levels to support efforts for achieving sustainable development in the country, such as the **National Green Reporting System (NGPS)** of Sri Lanka to promote reporting of sustainability performance in the manufacturing and services sectors. This reporting system is also listed as one of the requirements set out under the **Mission 09: “Greening the Industries” of Haritha Lanka Programme**.

Also, the **Green Accounting Mechanism** developed in Sri Lanka is another major sustainable development initiative undertaken to incorporate environmental dimensions into the system of national accounts, including environmental services and environmental losses and damages.

Sri Lanka has formulated many policies, strategies, programmes and action plans in relation with environment and sustainable development; what is needed is to enforce their implementation, to strengthen the institutional mechanism for inter-ministerial collaboration and to enhance human resources capacity to implement the SDGs after their approval at the General Assembly, and in particular for: - integration of the three dimensions of SD; - capacity of national statistics authority for data collection; - the development of national monitoring and review mechanisms, including evaluation of progress and responses for selected indicators appropriate for the national situation, and – strengthening the inter-ministerial collaboration to support SDGs implementation.

In this regards, the Government of Sri Lanka considers the role of the Regional Commissions, and UNESCAP in particular as crucial according to their mandate from the Rio+20 Outcome document “The Future we want. In addition, the UN Regional Commissions can become the platform for discussion of the UN Statistical Commission’s proposal for indicators at the regional level, which could lay the foundation for a regional monitoring and accountability framework.

The Sri Lankan Government considers also timely the proposal to develop a regional roadmap for implementing the post-2015 development agenda and for establishment of a regional platform for the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development as per background document E/ESCAP/FSD/(2)/1. One of the key areas of the roadmap could be focusing on food security and the need for strengthening regional cooperation in research and innovation for developing climate resilient and sustainable agriculture sector in the region.

With regard to the role, format and functions of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development beyond 2015, Sri Lankan Government would like to support the proposal as per background document E/ESCAP/FSD (2)/2:

- Holding standalone APFSD, which should be the platform for discussing the post-2015 development agenda and should integrate financing for development issues, as well as science-technology interface;
- Every four years holding APFSD at the highest possible level (Heads of States)

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, let me express that it is Sri Lanka's fervent hope for this 2nd Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and under your able leadership, to be steered to defining the future role and modality of the Forum. I also look forward to a concise outcome document, which is to reflect the consensus of the present deliberations of the Forum as key messages from the Asia-Pacific region to the High-level Political Forum to be held from 26 June to 8 July in New York.

Thank you, M-me Chairperson