

Ministerial Session
Deliberation of the Government of Sri Lanka
Mr. Anura Priyadharshana Yapa, Hon. Minister of Disaster Management, Government of Sri Lanka

Hon. Chair

Distnguished Colleagues

Ladies and Gentleman

On behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Government of India for organizing the first Asian Ministerial Conference on disaster risk reduction after the advent of the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction as well as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and also to thank the Government of India for taking initiatives to make this regionally important endeavor a success.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Sri Lanka is an island which is frequently affected by natural disasters. Floods, droughts, landslides and strong winds are considered as the major disasters experienced in Sri Lanka. Due to rapid development activities and the effects of Climate Change has resulted in an increase of the frequency of occurrence and the severity of these events during the recent few decades.

Disaster management in Sri Lanka became a mainstream subject after 1990, when the country endorsed the UN supported International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in 1989. After 2005, with the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action, a more systematic legal and institutional setup for disaster management was established in the country. During the HFA era, Sri Lanka enacted the Sri Lanka Disaster Management Act No13 of 2005 giving provisions to form the National Council for Disaster Management under the chairmanship of His Excellency the President to take all policy decisions pertaining to disaster risk management; the Ministry of Disaster Management to oversee the administrative roles; and Disaster Management Centre to coordinate and operationalize the policy decisions taken by the Council. HFA progress reports both from the government and the civil society show remarkable achievements the country has made in many HFA priorities; especially in priority 1 and 5. However, we also acknowledge the low performance with relevant to Priority 4 of the HFA. Therefore, our focus now is on identifying and addressing underlying risk factors of disasters.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

We also believe that sustainable development can never be possible unless we take proactive measures to correct our own decisions and actions. We, Sri Lanka, believe that Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction leads the way to show us how disaster risk reduction could be achieved, which is essential to make the development gains sustainable. Our challenge is to gradually strengthen our focus on managing disaster risks rather than managing disasters.

We have already taken measures to develop a national action plan and review our existing legal and institutional framework in the view of the Sendai Framework. My Ministry has already taken initiatives to review the existing legal and institutional framework and to identify an appropriate legal and institutional framework in the context of Sendai Framework. It is planned to develop country's next National Disaster Management Plan in line with the Sendia Framework. We are currently implementing a five year national programme titled "Sri Lanka Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme", which is also meant to mainstream disaster risk reduction into sectoral development plans of various other Ministries and agencies. Demonstrating the government's commitment to disaster risk reduction, Government has already approved and financed over Rs. 10 Billion worth of project under the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme.

However, being an island nation, Sri Lanka's progress in sustainable development is challenged by both climate change induced and other geo physical disasters making serious threat to the economic development of the country. The May 2016 floods and landslides disasters that affected almost 23 of 25 districts of the country accounted over Rs. 100 Billion worth damages and losses; most of those belong to the country's economic hub. Part of the Colombo city and suburbs went under water inundating over 40,000 houses . However, we managed to evacuate all the people without a single loss of life. The recent drought has seriously affected the livelihoods of rural farmers which necessitated drought relief on a large scale. Climate change predictions suggest an increasing frequency and

exacerbated impact from such events in the future. The government introduced a risk transfer mechanism through the National Insurance Trust Fund to cover all the houses and small to medium business enterprises in Sri Lanka against natural disasters. The total annual premium of the insurance policy amounting to Rs. 300 million is paid by the government.

Our success in facing such challenges rely on our commitment in understanding disaster risks, adequacy of our governance systems in addressing disaster risks, our commitment in investing in disaster risk reduction and our preparedness to face any unforeseen disasters as well as our preparedness for resilient recovery. These are core priorities of the Sendai Framework. It is also necessary that we build synergy between disaster risk reduction and climate risk reduction. Therefore, in this very significant Ministerial Conference, Sri Lanka would like to re-emphasise our commitments to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and provide our fullest support to regional initiatives to achieve our common goals in disaster risk reduction.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Sri Lanka always believe that challenges faced by us today and in the future could be better combatted by increased cooperation among nations. The agreements came into force in 2015 such as SDGs, Sendai Framework and Paris Agreement are for such common course. We as a signatory to the Paris Agreement welcome the commitment made by other countries in the region to support achieving emission targets. We are thankful to SAARC secretariat for facilitating an agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters among member countries and initiating a programme to promote Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction in South

Asia in line with the Sendai Framework. We also believe that for the meaningful implementation of the Sendai Framework and other agreements and frameworks, we need to look for ways to improve the technical cooperation of the countries, in terms of research, information sharing including satellite imagery for risk assessment, disaster preparedness and recovery and also on lessons sharing. Those will enhance our efforts in implementing the Sendai Framework and achieve sustainable development.

Eventually, I would like to thank the Government of India and UNISDR office for Asia and the Pacific again for organizing this important conference.

Thank you.