



**Statement by Hon. Wasantha Samarasinghe, Minister of Trade, Commerce, Food Security and Co-operative Development at the General Debate of the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD 16),
20 October 2025, Geneva**

Theme: “Shaping the Future: Driving Economic Transformation for Equitable, Inclusive and Sustainable Development”

Mr. President,
Madam Secretary-General of UNCTAD,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honour for Sri Lanka to speak at this important UNCTAD XVI Conference. I thank the Government and people of Switzerland for hosting us in this historic city of Geneva, where UNCTAD was born over 60 years ago.

Sri Lanka aligned with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We are meeting at a time when the world is facing many challenges. Developing countries, especially small and vulnerable ones like Sri Lanka, are feeling the pressure. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, debt problems, and rising global tensions have made it harder for us to grow our economies and improve the lives of our people.

But we are not here to lose hope. We are here to find solutions together to show that multilateralism and international cooperation still matter.

Mr. President,

UNCTAD remains a vital platform to help developing countries deal with the complex link between trade, development, finance, and technology. This conference must strengthen UNCTAD’s ability to provide policy advice, share knowledge, and help countries build stronger economies.

We appreciate that the theme of this conference focuses on economic transformation for sustainable and inclusive growth. This is exactly what countries like Sri Lanka are aiming for:

- to grow our economies in a way that includes everyone,
- to protect our environment, and
- to use trade and investment as tools to reduce poverty and create decent jobs.

Let me highlight five key areas where we hope to move forward together:

First, we must protect and rebuild trust in multilateralism. The world needs strong and fair international cooperation. When countries act alone or introduce unfair trade barriers, it hurts everyone, especially the smallest and the poorest.

Sri Lanka joins the G77 and China in calling for a fair and inclusive global trading system, with the World Trade Organization at its heart. Trade rules must support development, and not stop countries from choosing their own path to progress.

Second, we need urgent solutions for debt and development finance. Many developing countries are struggling to pay back loans while also needing money to invest in health, education, and climate adaptation.

Sri Lanka supports stronger international efforts to make financing fairer. This includes easier access to concessional finance, better debt relief tools, and reforms to the global financial system so that it supports—not hinders—sustainable development.

Third, the world is moving fast toward a digital future, but many countries are being left behind. We must make sure that digital technologies—such as AI, e-commerce, and data systems—help all people, not just a few.

UNCTAD has done important work on the digital economy. We ask that this work continue, especially to help countries to build digital infrastructure, improve digital skills, and shape fair rules for digital trade and data governance.

Fourth, trade and investment must support real transformation. Developing countries need to grow industries, add value to raw materials, and create jobs at home.

Sri Lanka is working on economic reforms to diversify our economy and attract responsible investment. But to succeed, we need policy space to make our own decisions and the support of global partners to overcome challenges.

We also see regional cooperation as a powerful tool. By working together, countries in our region can build stronger value chains and more resilient markets.

Fifth, and finally, we must act boldly on climate change. Sri Lanka, like many island and coastal nations, is feeling its severe effects. We urge all countries, especially the developed world, to meet their commitments on climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

At the same time, we want trade and environmental measures to be fair and transparent, and not to become new barriers for our exports.

Mr. President,

Despite the many difficulties we face, Sri Lanka remains hopeful. With the support of UNCTAD and our development partners, we believe we can recover stronger, build greener economies, and offer better futures for our people.

We call on this conference to deliver an outcome that is clear, balanced and action-oriented—one that speaks to the real needs of developing countries, and gives UNCTAD the tools and resources to keep supporting us.

Let us use this opportunity to renew our collective commitment to equity, sustainability and solidarity. Let us shape a future where no country is left behind, and prosperity is truly shared.

Thank you.