

**Pre-recorded video statement by the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs**  
**Fourth Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of Sri Lanka**  
**Geneva, 1 February 2023**

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

It is a privilege for me to welcome all of you to Sri Lanka's Review under the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

The year 2023 is a milestone for the global human rights architecture. We are celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The mechanism of the UPR marks the culmination of a long review process of the international human rights machinery. We value the fact that this mechanism provides an equal opportunity for all UN member States, without discrimination, to voluntarily share the progress made domestically to promote and protect human rights. This peer review process has contributed to reducing selectivity and politicization in our efforts to advance the cause of human rights. It enables constructive engagement on developments related to human rights with our international partners, national independent institutions, civil society, and the UN system.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka has made extensive preparations under difficult circumstances for a productive interaction with the UPR Working Group. Following my opening remarks, the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka in Geneva will lead our Review supported by officials representing key Government agencies. A number of other Government stakeholders, who have been involved in the preparation for today's review, are following the process

online, from Colombo, in support of the delegation. These multiple arrangements reflect the importance we attach to the UPR Review, and the advice of this Working Group in this regard.

**Sri Lanka's National Report** for the 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle captures the progress made over the last 4 ½ years and also the challenges faced in the process of implementing the recommendations accepted during the previous cycle. For maximum transparency, these recommendations had been made public in Sinhala and Tamil languages, and also shared with the relevant Government stakeholders for implementation through their respective sectoral action plans. Several rounds of consultations were held with these stakeholders to assess the status of progress. In this context, I myself, in my previous capacity as the Minister of Justice engaged, and currently as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, continue to engage with these stakeholders including civil society.

The National Report was produced through an extensive and inclusive process with broad consultations with local stakeholders including government ministries and agencies, civil society organizations and the national Human Rights Commission. I wish to express my gratitude to all those who contributed to this endeavor.

I also take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, and the UPR Secretariat, for the technical support to my delegation. Also, our deep appreciation to the troika, Algeria, Qatar and the United Kingdom for their cooperation, as well as to all members of the UPR Working Group who have inscribed to speak today.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka is a State Party to the 16 major UN Human Rights instruments, and we have actively cooperated in related reviews by treaty bodies. We have extended standing invitations to all thematic UN special procedures mandate holders and facilitated country visits by them. Progressive domestic implementation of these rights without discrimination have

empowered our people and protected vulnerable groups. These rights are enshrined in our Constitution and are justiciable in our courts. A vigilant online and offline media maintains a critical watch over government action and a vibrant and robust civil society continues to contribute to development and reconciliation efforts at community and national level. Implementation of policies that guarantee free access to health and education for all citizens and social security for the poor have contributed to improving their quality of life. Despite severe domestic and global challenges, we continue to make efforts towards the realization of the SDGs.

The implementation of the UPR recommendations since 2017 must be viewed against the background of critical national and international developments that have impacted on Sri Lanka since then. During the period under review - from 2017 to 2022 - Sri Lanka faced unprecedented challenges including the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effects of the war in Ukraine that culminated in serious economic and social challenges for the country. During my recent interventions in Geneva, I have highlighted that it is no exaggeration to conclude that the year 2022 was our most challenging period in recent times.

**On the broad political social and economic fronts** we have since made clear progress - democratic constitutional processes have been strictly adhered to in effecting political transition and our Parliamentary and public institutions have remained resilient. Following the recent social unrest, and in line with the aspirations expressed by the people, the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment to the Constitution has been enacted to enhance public trust in Government, empower Parliament, strengthen democratic governance and financial accountability and to combat corruption. In addition, the Government, to enhance transparency in the electoral process and to strengthen democratic governance, has enacted the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act, No. 3 of 2023, whilst the process to introduce an Anti-Corruption Bill has reached an advanced stage,

**On economic stabilization,** the Government is keenly aware and sensitive to the hardships encountered by the people due to certain recent reforms. However, these are necessary structural reforms that have long been overdue and essential to make the economy sustainable in the long run. The Government is addressing the underlying issues on a priority basis including by implementing strict financial control and oversight measures. This includes the Central Bank of Sri Lanka Bill which includes provisions to ensure and strengthen the independence of the Central Bank. The availability of essential items including fertilizer, fuel, medicine and energy has been maintained. Normal public, civilian and administrative routines have resumed after extended interruptions due to the pandemic and the social protests. Food and energy security have been brought under control.

The current austerity and economic stabilization measures have brought severe hardships for the people and the Government is committed through multi-pronged measures to afford its highest priority to **addressing the adverse socio- economic impacts**. Special budgetary allocations have been made for 2023 with an emphasis on better targeting of beneficiaries through accurate data. Enhancing the nutritional status of the people and ensuring food security has been prioritized. New laws are expected in this regard.

Mr. President,

We envisage 2023, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our independence, which coincides with the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration to be a year of socio-economic stabilization, reconciliation, and recovery. We will use this opportunity as a catalyst for realistic assessment of our challenges. We believe that it is important to learn from the past, and it is equally important to move on, to build better and stronger.

We are determined to strengthen ethnic harmony and to set a stable foundation for sound economic management, recovery and future growth.

We invite all Sri Lankans including overseas Sri Lankans to join us in this endeavor.

Mr. President,

As Sri Lanka prepares to undertake the next round of commitments under the UPR process, it is our resolve that, at this historic juncture, tangible steps are taken in the interest of national unity and reconciliation among the people.

In this context, a wide range of policy measures have been identified to be addressed expeditiously, including the establishment of a truth-seeking mechanism and a social justice commission. A new national security legislation replacing the PTA is at an advanced stage of being finalized. In order to engage in a mutually beneficial manner with Sri Lankans overseas in the national interest, an Office for Overseas Sri Lankans is being established. A Rapid Development Plan for the North and the East is being formulated to uplift the standard of living of the people in these areas as well as improve economic growth. Further, the President has called for the full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. In order to ensure that these processes progress effectively, a Cabinet Sub-Committee on reconciliation has been appointed by the President under his Chairmanship and several matters related to missing persons, Internally Displaced Persons, land and compensation have already been deliberated.

To garner the political support and to build consensus for these efforts, the President has convened an all-political party leaders' conference, including the Tamil and Muslim Party Members of Parliament, which was convened on two occasions since December.

While the immediate priority is economic recovery, the Government's commitment to the UPR process depicts our dedication towards the advancement of human rights.

Mr. President,

Against this background, we look forward to a constructive engagement with the UPR Working Group this morning as we share our experiences and welcome your suggestions leading towards the voluntary pledges that Sri Lanka will make. Following the conclusion of this Review we are keen on communicating the outcome of the process to all relevant domestic stakeholders with a view to consider appropriate modalities for the implementation of accepted recommendations in the next few years.

Thank you, Mr. President.