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# Minister Samarawickrama Meets with World Economic Forum (WEF) on the Eve of the Davos Summit

Minister of Development Strategies and International Trade Malik Samarawickrama during a two day visit to Geneva recently met with Mr. Børge Brende, President of the World Economic Forum (WEF) and senior officials engaged in areas relating to Sri Lanka.

The visit of the Minister took place as a continuation of Sri Lanka's engagement with the Forum facilitated by the Sri Lanka's Permanent Mission in Geneva, on the eve of the 2018 Davos Summit, which will take place from 23-27 January 2018, where the WEF Annual Programme takes shape. Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the WTO Ambassador R. D. S. Kumararatne, Board Member-Board of Investment -Mr. Mangala Yapa, and officials of the Mission were associated in these meetings.

During the meetings on 4-5 January, the two parties agreed to explore the possibility of hosting an 'Investment Round Table' in Sri Lanka in the near future. Mr. Brende who was the former Foreign Minister of Norway recalling his interactions with Sri Lanka, assured to work closely with the Government to strengthen cooperation between WEF and Sri Lanka.

The Minister also held discussions with senior WEF officials on the areas of Trade Facilitation, Future of Production, Private Sector Engagement and Sustainable Development Investment Partnership (SDIP). The possibility of embarking on collaboration between the WEF and Sri Lanka in the areas of focusing on sustainable production in apparels and textiles, upgrading the tourism sector, strengthening ICT related industries and making the agriculture sector more productive was also discussed. It was also agreed to explore avenues under *The Sustainable Development Investment Partnership* (SDIP) initiative, which is a joint initiative of the World Economic Forum and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in order to establish investment partnerships relevant to Sri Lanka's interest, in particular in the area of transportation and connectivity. It was also considered on having contacts with experts in relevant areas on both sides on a more regular manner, to exchange views and to follow up on developments.

During the visit the Minister also had a bilateral meeting at the Permanent Mission,

with the representatives of the '*Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation'* programme and it was agreed to consider a cooperation agreement to implement a "Multi-Country Consolidation hub" in Sri Lanka, under the '*Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation'* programme, leveraging on Sri Lanka's high potential to become a trade hub in the Indian Ocean and bolstering investment opportunities. Launched at the WTO 10th Ministerial Conference in 2015, the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation is a public-private platform that leverages business expertise, leadership and resources to support effective trade facilitation reforms that foster broad-based opportunity and economic growth in both developing and least developed countries.

Sri Lanka's engagement with the World Economic Forum gained much momentum following the participation of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Summit in Davos in January 2016 which was the first formal visit of a Sri Lanka leader to the WEF Summit on a special invitation, and subsequently in 2017. Following Dr. Philipp Rösler, the Head of the Centre for Regional Strategies and member of the WEF Managing Board visiting Sri Lanka in July 2016, marking the first official visit by a WEF representative to Sri Lanka, several WEF delegations have visited the country. The Sri Lanka Permanent Mission in Geneva also facilitated a Sri Lankan delegation consisting of senior government officials and representatives from the private sector to engage with the WEF in Geneva in March 2016, and for several Sri Lankan Ministers to attend WEF regional meetings held in Malaysia and China, as well as for the participation of the Prime Minister and other Ministers at the WEF-India Economic Summit. The Forum has also co-curated the 'Sri Lanka Transformation Map' with the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) and has identified 12 experts to join the World Economic Forum Expert Network. The 'Sri Lanka Transformation Map' has been presented to the Prime Minister and his high-level delegation at AM17 and was introduced at the India summit 2017.

Sri Lanka's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Mrs. Samantha Jayasuriya, First Secretary (WTO) Ms. Tharaka Botheju and First Secretary (UN) Mrs. Mafusa Lafir, were also associated with the Minister. Mrs. Helena Leurent, Head Government Engagement and Member of the WEF Executive Committee, Mr. Philippe Isler, Director, Global Allaince for Trade Facilitation,Mrs. Indira Kithsiri, Community Specialist, India and South Asia, and other WEF officials participated in the meetings from the WEF side.

Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to UN in Geneva
12th January 2018