



Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, Geneva

Tel : (+41) 022 919 12 50, Fax : (+41) 022 734 90 84

E-mail: mission@lankamission.org Web: www.lankamission.org

Address by Mrs. Samantha Jayasuriya, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations at the 68th Independence Day celebrations in Geneva - 6 February 2016

Venerable Clergy,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

As we are gathered here to mark the 68th Anniversary of the Independence of Sri Lanka, together with the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to WTO, Ambassador Susiri Kumararatne and all my colleagues in the Permanent Mission I have great pleasure and honor to welcome all of you to this solemn event.

Permanent Representative and Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the UN, Mr. Ravinatha Aryasinha, could not be with us today, as he had to travel to Sri Lanka in view of the visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to Sri Lanka which commenced this morning. While regretting his inability to be here with us, Ambassador Aryasinha has requested me to convey to all of you his warm greetings.

Sixty-eight years in retrospect is an opportune moment for us to reflect on how we, as a country has traversed the post-independence journey. It is obviously a history filled with successes and challenges, as well as opportunities we have used well and those we might have missed.

In the mid-sixties, while the rest of the Asian nations aspired to follow our foot path in realizing socio-economic development, yet we were unable to maintain the level of progress due to challenges that we all are well aware, including the long-drawn conflict in the country. Sri Lanka today is looking forward to recalibrate its economic policies to harness the true potential that the country is so blessed with, including its strategic location, abundant natural resources, as well as the comparatively strong human development capacities.

As you are well aware, over the past year, we have witnessed important dynamics in the political landscape of the country with the two main political parties forming a National Unity Government for the first time in post-independence history, led by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinhe. This unique collaboration, notwithstanding its inherent challenges, has presented to the world a Sri Lanka that is seeking to be a prosperous and peaceful nation, with equal opportunities for all its people, irrespective of

their cast, creed or ethnicity. The multi-faith religious observance performed a while ago by the reverend clergy representing all four main religions in Sri Lanka is a reflection as to how we have cherished and preserved our diverse and multi-faceted ethno-religious fabric. On 4th February this year, for the first time since 1949 February, the National Anthem has been sung at an Independence Day celebration in both Sinhalese and in Tamil- the two official languages of Sri Lanka, further promoting this rich diversity and harmony.

Our country today is on a path to realize sustainable peace and reconciliation, with a view to ensure that there will be no recurrence of the unfortunate divide and hatred on ethnic or religious grounds that has fractured our people in the past. It is a process where all Sri Lankans have a role to play. Those within the country, as well as those living outside. I am sure all of you, irrespective of the physical distance from Sri Lanka, are closely following developments in your motherland.

We are mindful that besides contributing to the economy of Sri Lanka through your remittances, you are also indeed representing Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan identity. By being proud of your Sri Lankan identity and encouraging the next generation to also learn and embrace our cultural and societal values, ethos and norms, you all are undoubtedly contributing to hold high, the esteem of mother Sri Lanka wherever you live. We are therefore very pleased that you have made it a point, to come with your children, grandchildren and friends, to make this occasion, also an event to gather as one family.

We at the Mission in Geneva, are accredited to a wide range of UN bodies and international organizations based in Geneva, and seek to promote Sri Lanka's cause across frontiers in many areas. Over the past year alone there have been tangible results in many of these areas and Sri Lanka has also contributed towards the international discourse relating to some of these issues;

- On **human rights**, there has been greater engagement with all interlocutors emphasizing on the friendly relations with all while maintaining the interests of the country and her people.
- In relation to **international trade** the Mission has been actively pursuing trade related issues through the **WTO, UNCTAD and the ITC**, including in the participation at the recently concluded WTO Ministerial Meeting in Kenya.
- On **migration**, working closely with the IOM and the ILO, including through the Colombo Process that Sri Lanka chairs, we have been able to put in place processes that help not only migrants from Sri Lanka but also the Asian region, in leveraging for safer, and better prospects for our migrants in destination countries.
- As the current Chair of the **G-15**, a Group of Middle Income Countries, we have been in the forefront in evolving a consensus among the Geneva Based Development Agencies and member states particularly in the process that culminated in the UN High-Level Meeting on Sustainable Goals.
- On **disarmament** Sri Lanka as Chair of Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), was able to move forward the Agenda on Lethal Autonomous

Weapons Systems (LAWS), an emerging area of new weapons systems, to enable for the first time a dedicated discussion on the subject among State parties.

- Our close relations with the **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**, has resulted in the ongoing implementation of a 10 point action plan, as an important tool for technological advancement as well as socio-economic development. Sri Lanka has most recently been selected as one of the four pilot countries to participate in a WIPO Project titled "**Intellectual Property, Tourism and Culture**".
- In June 2015, Sri Lanka signed an "Expression of Interest" (EOI) to begin cooperation between CERN and as a result engineers, scientists and researchers from Sri Lankan universities and research institutes will have the opportunity to gain valuable first-hand experience and knowledge in both experimental and theoretical 'particle physics' and related aspects of state-of-art technologies through the highly-demanded programmes conducted by CERN. It also provide opportunities for Sri Lankan students and high school teachers to apply on a competitive basis for the CERN's annual 'Summer Student' and 'High-School teacher' training programmes, which we hope will facilitate creating interest on learning physics.
- We have also intensified our engagement with the **WHO**, and at the Health Assembly last year, Sri Lanka together with a group of like-minded countries hosted an event on pictorial warning messages on tobacco products to highlight our commitment towards the fight against use of tobacco.
- Given the priority **humanitarian affairs** has taken in the international Agenda, we have been closely following the developments including the negotiations on the Sendai Framework on **Disaster Risk Reduction**, and also have contributed to the ICRC annual conference while maintaining close working relations with all humanitarian institutions such as ICRC, IFRC, UNHCR and OCHA.
- As a country that is a biodiversity hotspot, we also have been active on issues related to the **environment** and related areas, including the process that led to COP 21 in Paris Climate Agreement. The recent visit to Sri Lanka by the Secretary-General of **CITES**-the convention on the international trade on endangered species where Sri Lanka took part in an event to destroy a cargo of 'blood ivory' confiscated by Sri Lanka customs, are some of the key events in this regard.

The Mission in Geneva has also coordinated important visits over the past year which has accrued tangible benefits to Sri Lanka.

- as the Mission accredited to the Holy See, over the past year or so, we have coordinated both a visit to Sri Lanka by His Holiness Pope Francis and also by President Maithripala Sirisena to the Vatican, which has helped further consolidate relations between the two states.

- most recently, the Mission had the opportunity to coordinate the participation of Prime Minister Ranil Wicremesinghe at the Davos World Economic Forum, where the delegation had productive engagements with political leaders, CEOs and Heads of World renowned blue chip companies, as well as with the WEF itself in evolving global linkages that will help bolster the rapid economic programme envisaged by the new Government.

When working with all these international partners, we are very proud to have the support of and hear commendations about our Sri Lankan experts, both present and former who serve and have served in these agencies. I am pleased to note that some of them are here with us today, and we appreciate your good work and dedication to these institutions, and for the support you have given the Mission. I am also thankful to the many in this audience who work in other Diplomatic Missions in Geneva, for their help in leveraging the understanding and support of these countries in times of need.

Last but not least, you as the Overseas Sri Lankan community in Geneva and neighboring areas, through your Associations have been making collective efforts to promote unity, harmony and bring out the diversity of the Sri Lankan community through various activities that you organize and we applaud these efforts very sincerely. I also wish to encourage you to approach us, not only to avail of consular and other services, but also to share with us how best you can help our country.

On behalf of Ambassador Aryasinha and Ambassador Kumararatne, and my colleagues, once again I express my appreciation for taking time to be with us today to celebrate the 68th Independence Day of our country.

Thank You.