

Address by
Hon. John Amarathunga
Minister of Public Order, Disaster Management & Christian Affairs of Sri Lanka

Third UN Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
Sendai, Japan, 14-18 March 2015

Madam President
Secretary General of the United Nations
Heads of Government and State
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

We are gathered in this city of Sendai, today, in the Tohoku region of Japan which bore the brunt of the earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Coming from the island nation of Sri Lanka which suffered similar unprecedented devastation as a result of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, we recognise fully the significance of this World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. Although several years have now passed since the 2011 and 2004 disasters, our thoughts are still very much with the victims of those tragedies and their loved ones and I convey the sincere appreciation of the Government and peoples of Sri Lanka, to the Government of Japan for hosting this important Conference for the global community.

With increasing widespread disasters worldwide and the magnitude of the financial and human cost involved, the urgency of addressing disaster risk reduction and framing appropriate strategies cannot be overemphasized.

My country, Sri Lanka is experiencing disasters with increased frequency and severity. The Government has taken a number of initiatives to promote and strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction in the country as per the Hyogo Framework for Action.

Following the 2004 tsunami, successive Governments in Sri Lanka have taken positive steps in this aspect. As a result, Sri Lanka has achieved substantial progress in priority areas of governance, disaster response and preparedness. This has helped to reduce mortality and impact linked to hydro-meteorological disasters in terms of reducing vulnerability of communities.

Incorporating Disaster Impact Assessment system for road construction,
Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction into Housing sector and

Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction into development projects and approval processes at both national and local government levels are a few of our achievements during the last decade under HFA.

Sri Lanka now adopts the "Who does What, Where" (3W) database system developed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as the standard reporting format in managing all disaster response situations. This has assisted in streamlining national disaster management efforts.

Madam President,

The UN Secretary-General recently drew the world's attention to the fact that annual investment in disaster risk reduction of USD 6 billion can result in savings of up to USD 360 billion. It is apparent that investment in disaster risk reduction can save enormous financial and human resources necessary for development.

Whilst identifying opportunities associated with disasters is a prerequisite for more resilient, capable communities in the aftermath of disasters during the phase of recovery and reconstruction, post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation is a complex issue with several dimensions. Government, non-governmental and international organizations all have a responsibility in disaster recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Therefore, stronger linkages must be established and forged among these entities as well as within communities to promote disaster risk reduction.

Recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation are phases that provide opportunities to minimize future disaster risk by identifying, planning, and implementing failure modes as well as the intended risk of uncertainties associated with phenomena such as climate change. The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to the active implementation of the concept of **"Build Back Better"** as per the post HFA frame work.

Since governments bear the responsibility of ensuring national resilience, implementation, coordination and monitoring of post HFA mechanisms should be led by the Government through a national platform that assures multi-stakeholder participation.

Highlighting the common but differentiated principle at all levels of disaster risk reduction, Sri Lanka earnestly urges the international community for increased global cooperation and partnership with a view to transfer technological know-how, financial assistance and capacity building particularly for developing countries. I may further wish to place on record that a large number of people in Sri Lanka, who were affected by natural

disasters, are still languishing due to scarcity of funds. As a result, the process of reconstruction, rehabilitation and resettlement has taken an unduly extended length of time, thus making those people suffer even more. The Government of Sri Lanka has tenaciously endeavored to raise funds but, often, has been abortive. That said, the Government of Sri Lanka would be most grateful and appreciative to the international community and to donor agencies if they seriously consider extending cooperation and assistance to Sri Lanka at times of such calamity.

Madam President,

The year 2015 is a significant year for the world community. It is our fervent hope that the new updated global response framework for disaster risk reduction, arising through our deliberations here in Sendai, would be well aligned with the outcomes of the financing for development conference to be held in Addis Ababa in July, the post-2015 development agenda and the climate change agreement to be reached in Paris. These conferences provide a unique opportunity for the global community to execute more efficacious courses of action, thus underlying risk factors, risk sensitive investment enhancing methodology and public and private partnership, which are strongly envisaged to prevent disasters and extreme changes of climate, among others.

I wish this Conference all success in her deliberations and urge all stakeholders to be mindful of the responsibilities we owe to our citizens as we take the initial steps in Sendai which would galvanize the processes that would enable and facilitate us to ensure that by the end of this year, the world community would have a better and more stable foundation and road-map to realize enduring sustainability.

Thank you.

15, March, 2015