

Statement made by Hon. Kumara Welgama, Minister of Transport at the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Asia Pacific (UNESCAP) in Bangkok, Thailand, 25<sup>th</sup> April - 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013.

Mr. Chairman,

Executive Secretary of UNESCAP,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

First, may I express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Thailand and the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP and her staff for the excellent arrangements made for this meeting.

Our meeting comes at a time where the world is facing severe climatic risks and at a point when governments need to get ready to reduce such risks and become resilient to disasters. Occurrence of frequent disasters globally has become more critical and has resulted in major socio-economic impacts on development and governance.

Sri Lanka has had a bad experience of a Tsunami in December 2004. Climatic changes have had adverse effects especially in rural livelihoods. The increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters that have taken place in Sri Lanka over the past few years have to be factored in planning for growth specially in disaster prone districts.

Mr. Chairman, having identified the challenges due to present climate change, I wish to take this opportunity to explain briefly, the actions taken at a national level to meet natural disasters in Sri Lanka. Annually, the Sri Lankan Government spends considerable amount of funds for disaster related activities in addition to the support given by NGOs and INGOs. The Government of Sri Lanka has introduced measures ensuring wide range of public awareness for disaster risk reduction, mitigation and adaptation, and the provision of movable and non-movable infrastructure to counter extreme weather events. Public officers have been trained to face disaster related activities.

We have delegated authority to relevant Ministries to manage emergency situations through the supply of disaster relief, short term and small scale disaster rehabilitation activities and large scale restoration work of infrastructure damaged by a disaster. Further, Sri Lanka commemorates the 2004 Tsunami as a National Safety Day by conducting a wide range of awareness programmes throughout the country. In all Tsunami and landslide prone districts, early warning systems have been set up and the information is disseminated via mass media and cellular phones. A safety risk assessment and maps of disaster prone areas have been prepared to monitor the forthcoming disaster risks. At this point, I wish to gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by ESCAP and other international agencies in providing early warning facilities.

The Sri Lanka Disaster Management Policy was formulated in 2005 and under its aegis, the Disaster Management Act was passed in 2005. The Act also required establishing two important institutions; the National Council for Disaster Management (NCDM) and Disaster Management Centre (DMC) as the lead agency on disaster risk management in the country.

In addition to the extensive array of measures taken to face all types of disasters, the Sri Lankan economy registered a growth of 6.4 percent in 2012 while achieving a per capita income of USD 2,923 in 2012. The expansion of economic activities in the country has been reflected in the lowest unemployment level recorded and improved favourable macro economic conditions. It has resulted in the expansion of infrastructure facilities and renewed economic activities particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the country which were the theatre of conflict during the terrorist activities of the LTTE. Fortunately terrorism has been totally eradicated from Sri Lanka.

May I, in conclusion, express my gratitude for the efforts taken by UNESCAP team to build resilience to natural disasters in the region and the continued support extended to Sri Lanka in this context.

Thank you.