

Mr. Chairman,
Executive Secretary of ESCAP,
Honorable Ministers,
Distinguish Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

First, I would like to thank the Government of Thailand and the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP and her staff for the excellent arrangements made for this meeting.

I greatly appreciate the effective role ESCAP plays in paradigm development integrating economic, social and environment protection of member countries through institutional framework and strengthening capacities by regional cooperation and think tanks. The efforts of the ESCP have been immensely helpful to the Sri Lanka in formulating policies of our endeavor to move Sri Lanka to a middle income country.

Let me share with you a brief account of Sri Lanka's recent economic development. We have been fortunate to record a sustainable economic growth. The annual average inflation came down to 4 percent and unemployment rate is 4.3 percent. The budget deficit is 6.0 percent of GDP while government debt as a percentage GDP is 75.

Sri Lanka has been successful in reducing the poverty as reflected in the decline of the poverty headcount ratio to 6.7 in 2012/13 from 15.2 percent in 2006/07. This indicates the decline of the number of people living below the national poverty line. However, the persistent high level of poverty in rural areas remains a key issue to be addressed.

Although Sri Lanka has best nutrition, basic medical care and access to basic knowledge, the country needs to improve on personal rights and tolerance, according to the Social Progress Index released in last month.

Sri Lanka ranked 88 in the Social Progress Index, which evaluates 133 countries on 52 indicators that measure Basic Human Needs, Opportunity and Foundation of Well-being. In the Basic Human Needs Dimension, Sri Lanka ranked 75th while Foundations of Wellbeing Dimension, Sri Lanka ranked 81st scoring highest on Access to Basic Knowledge but lags on the Ecosystem Sustainability component. In the Opportunity dimension, Sri Lanka ranked 95th.

The new leadership of the country envisions a sustainable growth through achieving a lasting peace and reconciliation, strengthening and modernizing legal, judiciary and regulatory framework, improving public access to information through the establishment of Right to Information Act, etc. The new government has laid out an ambitious reforms agenda aimed at improving governance, transparency and accountability and setting up strong institutions to restore good governance, the rule of law and democracy to achieve economic prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Now I am pleased to give the some information pertaining to Sri Lanka's perspective on the UNESCAP programme on Regional Corporation on Space Technology Application for Sustainable Development and Disaster Reduction (RESAP) which is the UNESCAP's regional programme for promoting and facilitating national capacity development of the member countries in harnessing of the potential of space technologies in the diverse array of fields pertaining to sustainable development including disaster risk reduction.

Given the importance of the Sendai Framework on DRR (SFDRR) to the countries in Asia and the Pacific, Sri Lanka wishes to request ESCAP secretariat to take forward the implementation of SFDRR at the regional level.

Further, taking note of the important role of the science, technology and innovation in SFDRR, Sri Lanka wishes to urge the secretariat to deepen the STI applications, particularly effective use of Space Technology and ICT applications through regional cooperation, for disaster risk reduction in this region.

In our journey towards the middle income country the government places a strong emphasis on human capacity development. I wish to place my appreciation on support given by various UNESCAP programmes in this regard. Enhancing the use of ICT and guiding today's youth towards using technology is of prime importance to us. In this regard support extended by organisations like UNAPCICT to Sri Lankan universities and higher education is very much appreciated.

May I, in conclusion, express my sincere appreciation of the efforts of UNESCAP team to promote socio-economic development in the region and in that spirit, the continued support extended to Sri Lanka. I look forward to further strengthen our partnership in the future.

Thank you very much for your attention.