



SRI LANKA

Statement

by

Hon. G.L. Peiris

**Minister of External Affairs of
the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

during the

Special Session of the General Assembly

on

**“Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population & Development”**

United Nations, New York.
22nd September, 2014

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

I join other speakers to congratulate you and the Bureau members on your election.

The ICPD Programme of Action has drawn attention to the complex relationships that activities of humans, communities and countries have, *inter alia*, on patterns and levels of use of natural resources, economic and social development, and waste generation. By doing so, it has recognized that population dynamics are at the centre of the main development challenges of the 21st century, especially in the post-2015 development agenda. Its achievements over the past two decades are also remarkable.

Sri Lanka has taken initiatives adopting ICPD Principles to improve the quality of life of its people. The implementation of the Reproductive and Population Policy in 1998 and adoption of the National Maternal and Child Health Policy in 2013, are such direct outcomes. The National Secretariat for the Elders has developed a ten year Action Plan in collaboration with the WHO and UNFPA.

Sri Lanka's population is estimated to be 20.3 million at present, and is growing at an annual rate of 0.8 percent. According to demographic projections, the total population by 2041 will be 21.7 million people. Out of this population, 24.8 per cent will be over 60 years old, while 15.2 per cent will be less than 15 years old. Our working population by 2041 will be at a stable rate of 60 percent, which is a "demographic bonus."

Our development strategies have been "people-centric" and are socially sustainable. We exploited cross-cutting synergistic interactions of health care with basic education, improved water and sanitation, malaria control, and integrated rural development - including building rural roads, to create an enabling environment for its rural population, which is almost 80%. We have also integrated the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) into the national development agenda, and are on track in reaching most of the MDGs, while some have been already achieved at the national level. Among the notable achievements are those relating to equitable primary education, child mortality and maternal mortality, literacy, access to safe drinking water and sanitation. It is significant that there is no gender disparity in these achievements. The life expectancy in Sri Lanka has increased to 77 years for women and 69 years for men. Taking into account this overall positive profile, the UNDP 2013 Human Development Report ranked Sri Lanka among the high human development achievers.

With the transition in Sri Lanka's demographic profile and increased life expectancy, we are facing new challenges, namely the increasing incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), a growing aging population by 2030, addressing issues facing young people and containing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The increasing incidence of NCDs among the population is reflected in 39% of the total national health expenditure being spent on the treatment and prevention of NCDs. Given the deleterious impact the NCDs on overall labour force productivity and the economy, the Ministry of Health has launched a comprehensive NCD prevention programme throughout the country through the

National Policy on Chronic NCD Prevention. Strategies for reduction of major risk factors including smoking, alcohol, obesity, unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyles have also been formulated and implemented. Preventive and awareness raising programmes are implemented through the extensive health network in the country with the support of both national and civil society organizations.

In Sri Lanka, 12.5 percent of the population is elderly, and is expected to increase to 16.7 percent in 2021. These projections entail increased pension and healthcare expenditure in the national budget. The National Secretariat for the Elders in partnership with the Ministry of Social Services and Civil Society are implementing programmes to provide social protection, access to affordable and high quality healthcare and access to gainful economic activities for older persons. The National Charter and National Policy for the Elderly ensure the legal framework to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the elderly to ensure self-respect, independence and dignity to older persons.

We continue to remain a low prevalence country for HIV/AIDS, which among adults (over 15 years) is at 0.01%. It is estimated that there are around 3500 people living with HIV/AIDS in Sri Lanka. The National STD/AIDS Control Programme (NSACP) of the Ministry of Health spearheads the national response to HIV/AIDS. With the help of the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria, the NSACP has intensified its efforts to further reducing mother to child transmission. A nationwide campaign was launched in May 2013 to eliminate mother to child HIV transmission. Another contributing factor for the low prevalence of HIV/AIDS is the state-of-the-art blood transfusion services in Sri Lanka. Among awareness raising and preventive measures, peer education is widely encouraged and voluntary counseling and testing facilities have been made available through national and partner organizations. For marginalized groups, easy access to ARC treatment has been facilitated through national services.

The youth demographic of Sri Lanka is about 23% of the population, and 76.9% of the youth are concentrated in the rural areas. Substantial investments in education, health, infrastructure and employment sectors have been made by the government to increase the welfare and productivity of this demographic dividend with gender equity. We have involved youth in mainstream social, economic and political processes. Providing gainful employment for the large educated labour force is a daunting challenge. Sri Lanka believes that improving skills among the youth is an imperative in the post-2015 development agenda. Therefore, Sri Lanka called upon the United Nations in 2013 to declare 'an International Skills Day', to recognize and universalize the idea of enabling youth with employable skills. We also strongly advocate for mainstreaming youth participation and their perspectives in the Post -2015 Development Agenda. Sri Lanka successfully hosted the World Conference on Youth 2014 in Colombo in May.

Sri Lanka reaffirms the importance of the Programme of Action of the ICPD as a process seeking to ensure a more equitable and sustainable world for all. We also acknowledge and appreciate the contributions made by the WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, FPA in Sri Lanka and other partner agencies in facilitating Sri Lanka's achievements in human development.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.