

**Presidential Statement at the Agroecology Event at the 48th Session of the
United Nations Committee on World Food Security**

It gives me great pleasure to address you today at the Agroecology Event of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security.

Climate change is one of the most serious issues humanity faces. Mitigating its impact requires urgent collective action from all countries.

Individual nations must devise means to adapt to life in a changing climate. Ensuring food security through agroecological adaptation is an essential part of this.

If we are to preserve the health of our planet and ensure human sustainability, Governments the world over must not hesitate to adopt bold policies. Such policies should support ecological conservation, help combat the loss of biodiversity, and enable people to achieve their economic aspirations in more sustainable ways.

In April of this year, the Government of Sri Lanka banned the import of artificial fertilisers, pesticides, and weedicides. Our decision took into account broader ecological issues as well as significant public health concerns.

Use of artificial fertilisers and agrochemicals has been associated with the rise of non-communicable diseases amongst the general public. They have also long been identified with high incidence of chronic illness in the heartland of Sri Lanka, where they have been overused for decades.

Largely due to aggressive marketing by the agrochemical lobby and a lack of education amongst farmers, it is estimated that nearly 80% of the nitrogen fertilizer used in Sri Lanka is wasted. Excess fertiliser contaminates the land and seeps into the groundwater. It worsens soil degradation and water pollution, and increases greenhouse gas emissions.

My Government's decision to ban imports of artificial fertilisers and agrochemicals will therefore enable a long-needed national transition to a healthier and more ecologically sound system of organic agriculture.

We are aware that there will be teething problems during this transition. These include constraints in domestic production and supply of organic alternatives, as well as adverse public perceptions arising from the ban.

However, as leaders, it is our responsibility to take decisive action despite the challenges we will face. If we hesitate to make decisions, essential initiatives such as this will always remain confined to the realm of discussion.

The Government of Sri Lanka is ready to support our farmers and agriculture-based industries as our agroecological transition takes place. Support mechanisms include subsidies to farmers as well as the purchase of paddy by the Government at a guaranteed price if yields are reduced temporarily.

We would greatly appreciate the support of the international community, including multilateral organisations, individual Governments, climate funds, technical experts and bodies, as well as businesses and investors to strengthen our domestic capacity in organic farming.

Increasing production of bio fertiliser, promoting adoption of organic soil enhancement technologies and management techniques, knowledge sharing on improved agricultural practices, and strengthening of research and development

into organic agriculture are some of the ways in which this support could be structured.

I am confident that Sri Lanka's decision to ban imports of artificial fertilisers and agrochemicals will pave the way for a greener economy and a healthier society, whilst supporting our aspirations in terms of food security in the long term.

I further hope that Sri Lanka's initiative will inspire other Governments to take similarly bold action for the betterment of their nations, their citizens, the health of our planet, and for our future generations.

Thank you.