

**Statement delivered by  
His Excellency W. Weerasekara, Commissioner General of Agrarian  
Development, on behalf of the Honourable P. Harison  
Minister for Agriculture, Rural Economic Affairs, Livestock Development,  
Irrigation, Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development  
of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
on the occasion of the  
41st Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy (22-29 June 2019)  
24 June 2019**

Ayubowan/ ආයුබෝවන්, Good Afternoon,

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delivering this statement on behalf and, at the expressed request of the Honorable P. Harrison, Minister of Agriculture of Sri Lanka, who could not make his presence here today due to unforeseeable circumstances.

Let me at the outset, convey the compliments of His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka, Mithreepala Sirisena; the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickramasinghe; and greetings from the people of Sri Lanka and, my personal wishes to the newly elected FAO Director-General, Mr. Qu Dongyu and we are confident that with your varied hands-on experience in the field of agriculture, will meet of the expectation of the FAO and particularly, benefit small island nations, such as Sri Lanka. We also thank Mr Graziano da Silva, the outgoing Director-General for his commitments given to Sri Lanka in the field of agriculture, enabling Sri Lanka to move from a lower to upper middle level nation.

I also, wish to register our gratitude at this Conference to all our friendly nations for the unconditional heartiest support given to us during the recent Easter Sunday terrorist attack, which took many lives of different ethnicity from us. Your support helped us to bring back Sri Lanka to normalcy.

I am very pleased to address at the 41st session of the FAO Conference and seize this opportunity to congratulate and thank FAO for organizing this Session focusing on “The State of Food and Agriculture: Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development”, a theme which is very relevant to my country.

Ladies and Gentleman,

We believe that the foundation for the development in Sri Lanka is through Agriculture Development and, over an 80 percent of the population is living in semi- urban and rural areas. My Ministry is fully committed to achieve this gigantic task through empowering the rural sector. But, many challenges lay ahead of us.

“The King Parakramabahu, the Great” who ruled Sri Lanka in 12<sup>th</sup> century said: “Not even a single drop of rain water should be permitted to flow to the ocean, without having given its full benefit to the man”. To arrest water flowing to the sea, the Kings of Sri Lanka constructed the Tank cascade system in the Dry Zone, which is a true Sri Lankan FAO- GIAHS heritage. This system is a perfect solution, as resilient to the floods and droughts, which resulted from the climatic issues in the country.

The extreme drought in 2017 has shattered our food security status and affected the livelihood of thousands of farmers. In contrast, we had a bountiful harvest during the subsequent season in 2018/2019, and again, today we are facing a serious drought. We appreciate the initiatives taken by the FAO in restoring the historical tank cascade system as a world agricultural heritage site.

While continuing to improving on other agrarian, land and water management systems, including rehabilitation of degradable agricultural land with FAO assistance, we are looking forward to build a climate-resilient agricultural production system through a conservation-oriented management and investment plan.

We had to face the new threats, such as the invasion of Fall Army Worm, but with the supports, especially from FAO, we were able to control it without much damage.

We need to empower the producer, with better price for their produce by adding value to their primary products and by directing them to suitable markets, while minimizing the role of the middle-man.

Food without Chemical Residues, is the need for the day. We have embarked on a mission to make every farmer, as a GAP farmer, who follows “Good Agricultural Practices”. Further, we are determined to reduce the post- harvest losses by providing necessary facilities to all players in the Value Chain.

FAO has assisted us to prepare the Agriculture Policy document in keeping with the current developments and has helped us in many ways to improve the food security situation in the island, particularly to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030.

Mr Chairman, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, let me finally express my personal appreciation to all of you and, especially to your representatives in Colombo, Sri Lanka, who works very closely with my Ministry to achieve the said goals.

I thank you very much.