

International Conference on Nutrition -ICN2

Country Statement of **Sri Lanka**

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Sri Lanka, an island nation of 20 million people, is a multiethnic, multi-religious society. The current average life expectancy of the population is 74.3 years(*UNDP Human Development Report 2014*)the GDP is over 3000 USD.

In the field of nutrition, Sri Lanka has made significant strides since the ICN 1992. Prevalence of wasting and stunting of children under the age of five are 13 and 11percent respectively. The prevalence of iron deficiency anaemia has declined to 15% over the past two decades, a 3 fold reduction. Although, the prevalence of low birth weight remains around 16 percent, overweight and obesity are being recognized as an emerging problem placing Sri Lanka among countries with the double burden of nutrition.

Having recognized the complex nature of the problem, the country has embarked on a multi sectoral approach of combating and controlling nutritional problems.The National Nutrition Council was established with the Head of State as its chairman. This was made possible by the formulation of the National Nutrition Policy in the year 2010 with the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers. Coordination among the various agencies is conducted at the highest level, the Presidential Secretariat. This has no doubt ensured highest political commitment.

With the implementation of these changes, we have been able to strengthen the nutrition services, particularly in the fields of infrastructure development and capacity building at grass-root level involving even the previously conflict affected provinces. Sri Lanka realizing the significance of improving the nutrition status of all population groups, adopted the life cycle approach of intervention.

The antenatal care of pregnant mothers as well as care of infants and young children has been given special attention recognizing the importance of the first 1000 days. We have been able to consistently maintain high rate of exclusive breastfeeding rate and the last DHS survey shows 78 percent. A school meal for schoolchildren is being given in all under privileged districts. A glass of milk is given to all school children in selected areas and measures have been taken to scale-up this activity. A new initiatives are being taken to encourage consumption of fresh milk and substantial allocation were made through the national budget. Effective health services including high immunization coverage have substantially contributed to control several communicable diseases.

National supplementary food programme(*Thripasha*) aimed at identified target groups remains vibrant and has a very high demand. Of the multitude measures taken to improve food security, a significant fertilizer subsidy to improve the yield of major food crops and a comprehensive programme to improve household food security (*DiviNeguma*) stand out. Adequate safety-nets in the form of poverty alleviation programmes(*Samurdhi*) have been taken for the low income groups to ensure basic nutrition needs.

Yet, Sri Lanka is not complacent and is making all efforts to overcome the remaining challenges, especially in a situation where urban migration remains significant, with ever increasing numbers of working mothers and other contemporary issues. Reliance on diversification of food and other food based approaches are being given the highest priority. Fortification, which was effectively used to control iodine deficiency disorders is being considered as a strategy to combat other micronutrient deficiencies. I assure this audience that the Sri Lankan government will continue to be committed towards addressing the remaining challenges. We are hopeful that together with the significant economic growth and the other development efforts that are taking place in the country, we will be able to achieve the desired nutrition goals for our people.