Country Statement by Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage, 
Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka 
77th Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), 27th April 2021 

Chairperson, 
Her Excellency Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, 
Excellencies, 

Good Morning! 

It is with great pleasure that I address the Seventy Seventh Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), on the theme Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific. It is only apt that we deliberate on the subject given that the COVID 19 pandemic has affected almost every country. On the outset, reaffirming its commitment to international cooperation, Sri Lanka is co-sponsoring the resolution put forward by Thailand on the theme and supports all efforts of Member States. 

Excellencies, 

Sri Lanka’s “Whole of Government and Whole of Society” approach, “Preemptive Strategy”, and “matured Public Healthcare system” was key in controlling the spread of the pandemic and keeping the death rate comparatively low against the high recovery rate. The spread of the pandemic is now under control with less than 200 reportings per day. 

Sri Lanka military personnel were deployed from an early stage to support the health authorities in controlling the pandemic through contact tracing and quarantine processes. The Government to date has brought home over 125,000 standard Sri Lankans, including migrant workers and students and the repatriation process continues. The Government also provides free quarantine and health care facilities, especially for repatriated migrant workers. 

The National Vaccination Programme was started on 17 February 2021. As at 10 April 2021, AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine has been received by over one million Sri Lankans.
and the Sinopharm vaccine by 2,500 Chinese nationals. The Government has planned to purchase the required doses of vaccines for the required population on a staggered basis. Plans are also underway to use Sputnik-V vaccination in the near future. Sri Lanka looks forward to possible assistance from Asia-Pacific countries for the ongoing National Vaccination programme.

To keep the supply chain moving, Sri Lanka export sector continue to function and the, seaports and airports continue to be open for the movement of cargo. All sectors stringently follow the COVID-19 survey strategy to monitor and survey the workforce. Since the opening of the country for tourism on 19 January 2021, over 10,000 international tourists have visited the country under the safe and secure Travel Bubble Programme. Recently, Sri Lanka Tourism introduced two tour packages; for fully vaccinated and non vaccinated tourists to visit pre-approved tourist sites without mixing with the local community. The tour packages also include a COVID-19 health insurance for US $ 12.

Recognizing the importance of Public-Private Partnership in the recovery process, “Itukama COVID-19 Healthcare and Social Security Fund” was established with contributions from private businesses and the public through a crowd sourcing funding modality.

Further, several private sector companies support COVID-19 intermediate treatment facilities and quarantine centers. Immediate measures were taken to promote resilience building and inclusive recovery from the pandemic, including continuous financial support for households, businesses, and numerous grace periods for the payment of several taxes. The Central Bank deducted policy rates and implemented a concessionary refinancing programme to provide low-cost credit.

Excellencies,

Sri Lanka has set its own national development targets, driven by global level of ambition, but also taking into account, the national context, priorities and circumstances. The National Policy Framework ‘Vistas for Prosperity and Splendour’, formulated after extensive consultations with diverse sets of stakeholders, effectively integrate Sri Lanka’s commitment to achieve Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
To this end, an Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee on Sustainable Development has been formed and the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka has been reconstituted as the national focal agency.

The Ministry of Justice of Sri Lanka has initiated a program to digitize the entire judiciary system and has allocated funds to develop infrastructure and install video conferencing systems to facilitate distance case hearing.

Further, year 2021-2030 has been declared as the Decade of Skills Development to empower youth in the country.

Based on Non-aligned, and Asia Centric foreign policy, Sri Lanka engages with all external partners and the United Nations and allied agencies for technical as well as financial cooperation. The Governments of India and China, the United Nations, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have supported Sri Lanka in meeting its immediate recovery needs.

Moreover, in order to face today’s challenges of COVID-19 pandemic, and to ensure sustained socio-economic recovery, Sri Lanka emphasizes the importance of quality investments in public health services, universal health care and social protection systems, digital economy, technology transfer, home-grown development strategies, climate and environment responsive approaches, empowerment of women, aligned with the SDG-2030.

To support Sri Lanka’s ongoing resilient, inclusive and sustainable development pathways, it is important for member states of economic strength in the Asia-Pacific region to provide smaller economies like that of Sri Lanka with investment, greater market access and trading opportunities. This would enable smaller states to carry out their economic activities while mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

Excellencies,

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the need to work as a collective, if we are to build back despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic or any other calamity.

I extend my warm best wishes for a successful 77th session. Thank you!