

Second Committee General Debate
67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Statement by

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Mr. Chairman,

The delegation of Sri Lanka congratulates you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. May I take this opportunity to assure you of our fullest cooperation in your work. We also wish to express our appreciation of the contribution of His Excellency Dr. Abdul Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations in New York, Chair of the Committee of the 66th Session, and other members of the Bureau for their excellent work. The inspiring keynote address by Professor James Robinson and the detailed contribution of Under Secretary-General, Wu Hongbo, will further encourage the Committee as it seeks meaningful outcomes.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Algeria on behalf of the G-77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

This year we have a crucial challenge before us. The patiently negotiated Outcome Document of the historic UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), provides us with the blueprint for the global sustainable development agenda. We have the task of making it more meaningful to all of us and deliver concrete and pragmatic outcomes, that will, over the years, benefit humankind. It is imperative that we transform the enthusiasm reflected in the Outcome Document into tangible action and fulfill the aspirations of our peoples for a sustainable future. Sri Lanka firmly believes that these commitments should be translated into action by our common efforts through intergovernmental processes and with the full co-operation of the UN system. All intergovernmental processes under Rio+20 and the work of the different Panels of Experts

appointed by the UN Secretary-General must complement each other. As we develop the Outcome Document further through these intergovernmental bodies and expert groups, it is paramount that we remember the primacy of the people's undeniable right to development.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, global warming and climate change loom as the major issues confronting the international community. The very existence of humanity and the future of our children become a worrying challenge. Emission levels, historically, caused largely by human activity in a small number of industrialized countries, as they raced towards achieving ever higher levels of creature comforts, have negatively impacted the global environment, contributing to global warming, climate change and sea level rise. Many developing countries, including my own, are continuing to struggle, to regain lost opportunities for the improvement of the lives of our people while simultaneously confronting the threat of global warming and climate change.

Because of their historical responsibility, which has been acknowledged in multilaterally agreed instruments over the years, it is imperative that we seek a higher level of commitment from the industrialized countries as we focus our attention on addressing this issue. Justice and equity would demand this. The current multilateral arrangements remain sorely inadequate. We urge the developed world to deliver on its promises proactively, as arresting human induced climate change is the common goal of humanity. In this struggle, there will be no winners or losers. Humanity will emerge victorious or we will condemn it to a future of uncertainty and misery, depending on what we do or do not do in the next few years.

Mr. Chairman,

It is with sadness that I note that we have only three years left to realize the MDGs in all target countries. Unfortunately, we see many developing countries still struggling on the road to the MDGs. A range of factors have contributed to this situation, particularly the shortfall of funding from countries which once made commitments to assist. The global financial crisis, intensified by the cavalier approaches of financial markets of developed countries coupled with the lack of proper regulation, has been a critical factor which has disrupted the social fabric of many societies and has affected the lives of millions, especially in developing countries. The contraction of export markets, the continued restrictions on market access, the energy costs and looming food shortages will contribute to further aggravate this situation. A backward slide into poverty is a reality in the case of millions.

Sri Lanka's economy, which benefitted from careful management during this uncertain period, is one of the Asian developing country economies that has recorded impressive gains. Our balanced socio-economic strategies propelled us to middle-income status a few years ago despite the debilitating disruption caused by a prolonged terrorist challenge and the Indian Ocean Tsunami. Sri Lanka has demonstrated remarkable resilience in achieving most of the MDGs already. The economy expanded by approximately 8.2% in 2011. Our agriculture and fisheries sectors have continued to grow. Due to astute government policies and appropriate interventions, food insecurity is no longer an issue for Sri Lanka and absolute poverty has been reduced to 7.9%. 85% of the population has access to potable water. Child and maternal mortality rates have been reduced to the levels of more affluent countries. 91% of the population is connected to the electricity grid. "Energy for all" will be a reality in Sri Lanka before 2015. Sri Lanka will also rely on renewables for 20% of its energy needs by 2020, contributing to the goal of "Sustainable Energy for All". Consistent with the "education for all" goal of the UN, Sri Lanka has achieved a 98% literacy rate, with a higher rate for girls and women. ICT literacy in the country is following a path of exponential growth with a target of 75% ICT literacy by 2015, using broadband. Sri Lanka's Network Readiness Index ranking, published by the World Economic Forum, has improved significantly. Cellular phone penetration stands at over 100%. We believe that the investments which brought these results were essential to build a healthy, literate, productive and entrepreneurial human resource base.

Happily, Sri Lanka's carbon footprint remains negligible. As we seek further industrialization to fulfill the growing socio-economic demands of our people, especially the employment needs of our youth, like most developing countries, we will need financial assistance and technology to follow a growth pattern that will not compromise the future of our children.

Sri Lanka is always ready to share its experiences and expertise with others, and we are willing to promote further South-South cooperation, particularly among middle-income countries. We have achieved much and we have much to share. The action plan of the UN Office for South-South Cooperation should be implemented earnestly.

Mr. Chairman,

The Committee has also within its mandate the subject of "Maintenance of International Peace and Security with special reference to the Permanent Sovereignty of Palestinian people in

the occupied Palestinian territory". The world should not delay the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Sri Lanka fully supports the implementation of all relevant UN Resolutions on Palestine that would pave the way for the achievement of Palestinian Statehood and bring sustainable peace to the region – a critical factor for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

Your plans to increase the Committee's productivity by implementing a time-saving approach are commendable. Holding joint meetings with the Third Committee and ECOSOC in order to explore common ground, follow-up and the implementation of the outcomes of the major UN conferences is therefore important. During the next two months we have the most challenging task of striking a constructive balance among the three main pillars of sustainable development while also reflecting the principles of equity and the common but differentiated responsibility principle in all the work of this Committee. Though the Committee's agenda outlines a number of broad areas, we must focus on the most urgent and essential action items.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.