

President of the General Conference,

Chairman of the Executive Board,

Madam Director General,

Distinguished members of the Executive Board,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you Mr. President, Mr. Chairman and Madam Director General.

It is my pleasure and honour to address this august gathering. Let me start by stating that Education lays the foundation for Sustainable Development. “විද්‍යා දැනුමේ විනාශය” - Education nurtures discipline. Disciplined society is instrumental to the development of a country. Having that in mind, we formulate our educational reforms in line with Sustainable Development Goals. Main reform objectives for our education are to End poverty in all its forms, Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. We believe education is of central importance in promoting national unity and solidarity among different social groups of a country.

In view of the above, a series of educational reforms are being introduced. Necessary legal and administrative environments are being created to implement 13 years of guaranteed, compulsory education as one of our major educational reforms. With this initiative, it is expected to achieve zero drop-out rates from school system and to improve capacities and competencies among youth and to contribute towards economic development.

Mr. Chairman,

Several programmes are also in the pipeline to ensure inclusive and quality education for all. A conducive policy environment would be created through the enactment of the new Education Act and formulation of the National Education Policy with stakeholder participation. The Acts on National Institute of Education and National Colleges of Education will be amended concurrently. This will be complemented with restructuring of the Ministry of Education and the provincial set-up of Education. Establishment of school inspectorate, formulation of school based teacher cadre policy, elimination of additional waiting and lagging time between exams, establishment of School Boards and human resource development and training will enhance the education service delivery. The Board of Management of the UNESCO Category 2 Centre for Teacher Development in the South Asian Region met to regularize the programmes. Implementation of the Nearest School is the Best School Programme and increasing accessibility to National Schools will contribute to eliminate inequality and exclusiveness. We have also taken initiatives to monitor and regulate non-state sector education institutes in order to harness private sector involvement in education while ensuring the quality and affordability of service delivery.

The Ministry of Education established a special division for National Unity and Reconciliation. I acknowledge and appreciate the assistance provided by GIZ in this regard. This Unit is entrusted to work in collaboration with the stakeholders in education to introduce necessary curriculum reforms and implement various programmes to build trust and mutual understanding among different ethnic groups that were torn apart by 30 years of ethnic conflict. Education for Peace and Sustainable Development has been recognized as an integral part of education by our Government.

I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to UNESCO for providing us technical expertise to formulate a National Policy on ICT in Education and to develop an ICT Master Plan to streamline education management and improve quality of education and service delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Realizing the importance of the soft component of heritage, the Government of Sri Lanka has initiated to develop a National Policy on Protection and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage with the expert assistance of UNESCO. Organizations are being strengthened to enhance protection and management of heritage sites. History and heritage have been made mandatory in the school curricula. Application of ICT for heritage promotion and education has been widely explored.

Distinguished delegates,

The global community is heavily engaged in formulating strategies to achieve sustainable development while combating climate change and leaving no stones unturned to achieve SDGs. I am pleased to inform you that Sri Lanka has taken several significant initiatives in this regard. Establishment of a dedicated Ministry, Enactment of Sustainable Development Act in Parliament to create the legal framework, and Appointment of a Parliament Select Committee to supervise the process are some examples. We have also commenced formulating a “National Sustainable Development Roadmap” under the theme of “Planning for an Inclusive Transformation” with the participation of stakeholders. We expect greater commitment at the international level to build capacities and finance the national sustainable development agenda.

Excellencies,

Being a state party to Paris Agreement, Sri Lanka took several initiatives to combat desertification and climate change. Establishment of Climate Change Commission of Sri Lanka, developing Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, implementation of Blue-Green Village Programme, Creation of a National Green Climate Fund, Reduction of Greenhouse Gases through Forestry and establishment of Blue-Green Initiative Secretariat are some of these initiatives. A comprehensive National Action Plan to implement Lima Action Plan for Man and Biosphere Reserves is being developed.

Mr. Chairman,

We have realized that a country cannot develop technologically and economically without basic scientific research infrastructure and qualified persons to support Research and Development sector of the country. Hence, Basic Sciences, Emerging Technologies and Indigenous knowledge has been included as one of the ten focus areas in the National Research and Development Framework. We have a rich traditional knowledge base which can be used to find sustainable solutions for many pressing issues in agriculture, environment, irrigation and health. Finally, the rich mineral deposits in Sri Lanka have to be wisely utilized with value addition through research for greater economical advantage. We have taken several steps to address the above issues, but, we would also welcome collaborations with UNESCO, other countries and multilateral companies for future developments.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.