

Commission on Science and Technology for Development 17th Session, 12 - 16 May 2014

**Ministerial round table on “Science, technology and innovation for the post-2015
development agenda”**

12 May 2014

**Statement by Mr. Patali Champika Ranawaka, Minister of Technology and Research of
Sri Lanka**

DRAFT SPEECH FOR HON. MINISTER**GENEVA MEETING – MAY 2014.**

I thank you Mr. Chairman for this opportunity to discuss Sri Lanka's development agenda for 2015 and beyond.

The country's economic growth targets are ambitious and there are expectations that the Science, Technology and Innovation sector will contribute to the achievement of those targets. We accept that constraints to growth must be identified and meaningful responses must be integrated into the national development agenda.

Within the STI sector, our focus has been on how we can improve productivity, build capacity, enhance value addition to our industry products, make research relevant so as to make our responses meaningful. We have decided that ad hoc and fragmented policies and investments must stop. We need an approach that's cohesive and focused.

How do we plan to achieve this?

On an assessment of how the Research and Development sector can be more effective in contributing to the development agenda of the country, my Ministry, the Ministry of Technology and Research has identified that the projects and programmes of the sector must of necessity be aligned to national needs and priorities and that effective strategies must be adopted to ensure that alignment.

We accept that such an alignment can be achieved only after an honest assessment of the needs of the nation and an identification of what the R&D sector must do, to create a meaningful impact to respond to those needs.

For this purpose, we are currently engaged in formulating an Investment Framework for R&D for our country. The framework, when finalized will form the basis for Government investments in the R&D sector. The Framework will eliminate what the scientists are often blamed for – engaging in research projects which have meaning to the scientific world but which are not always an effective response to the development priorities of our own nation. In formulating this Framework, we have adopted a participatory and inclusive process so as to ensure that the views of all stakeholders are obtained.

The outcome of this initiative will be to integrate R&D strategies into the national development agenda and to secure the resources for implementation of R&D initiatives that will produce results. We do not believe that the pursuit of Science, Technology and Innovation policies independently of public policy goals has any value. STI necessarily has linkages with many development areas and must be pursued in that context.

Mr. Chairman, we believe that our research initiatives must either benefit the people of this country in a direct way, ie through applications of research findings for example in the Health and Agriculture sectors or in an indirect way, by its contribution towards the creation of an innovation based economy.

In pursuance of the objectives I have set out, we have taken many steps.

Sri Lanka completed the establishment of a Centre of Excellence as the initial step in the first Science Park in the country. The Science Park is being established through a model that provides for public-private collaboration. This model has worked well and we believe there's great merit in its structure which provides for the active participation of our top industry giants. The scientists at the Centre of Excellence are engaged in research projects in collaboration with industry partners. Work is currently ongoing to add more Facilities that will bring the Park to world standards. We are confident of the quality of our scientists. The excellence of the work carried out at the Centre as well as the facilities that are available at the Park, will inspire partners from overseas to collaborate with us.

We are conscious that traditional knowledge can play a decisive role in the development of technology. The feats of the Rulers of ancient Sri Lanka stand testimony to the engineering and other marvels that have since been lost to current generations. We plan to examine these technologies with a view to using the principles therein for future applications as relevant.

We have a belief that the transfer of technology at even the lowest levels of society will enhance economic upliftment of our people and direct them to micro industries. My Ministry implements a programme that ensures the transfer of new technology that has meaning to the rural communities, so as to empower them to become entrepreneurs, using natural resources readily available in the village. The programme has great potential as a poverty alleviation intervention. Village level Centres provide its community with access to technologies developed by our own Public Research Institutes, access to information on science and technology, transfer of knowledge and guidance to become entrepreneurs and information regarding market access.

Another area of special focus has been in respect of innovation. We have pledged to increase support for innovators by linking them to funding sources. Mobilizing financial resources to ensure the progression of a good idea through the development phase and finally to the market place, is a challenge. The involvement of financial and business sectors in this progression is vital and initiatives have commenced to enable appropriate tie ups. Many of our young scientists have received world recognition for their inventions, and it is our belief that the knowledge resource that we have must be nurtured to derive maximum outcomes.

We have entered into many Bi-lateral arrangements with countries to pursue co-operation in areas relevant to STI. We are also engaged in joint research programmes. I believe that regional arrangements that provide for an exchange and sharing of experiences and expertise and also the pooling of resources is vital in our efforts to develop.

At this stage of the country's development, we need to make use of the knowledge base available in abundance amongst the scientists in my country, to ensure that we realize our goal of a knowledge based economy. One of the greatest challenges that we face today is that of reversing the brain drain. Excellent scientists produced by our own Universities are lured to western nations by offers of attractive opportunities to further their skills and learning. We are committed to finding ways and means of addressing that challenge.

The expectations from the Science, Technology and Innovation sector to contribute to the economic agenda are indeed serious. Our goal Mr. Chairman is to ensure *sustainable* and inclusive development and the creation of a Science, Technology and Innovation eco system in my country that will enable the achievement of that goal.

Mr. Chairman we appreciate the initiatives of the UN and its organs and note the positive approach in Resolutions that recognize the vital role played by science and technology including environmentally sound technologies in development. We look forward to the leadership of Organisations such as this, to provide, through its many initiatives, the necessary impetus to enable science, technology and innovation to play its role in the pursuit of sustainable development in our countries including through regional arrangements.

I Thank you.