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வெளிநாட்டு அமைச்சு
FOREIGN MINISTRY

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Statement by Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, at the NIICE Global Conclave 2021, 25 June, 2021

Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Dear Friends,

First of all, I wish to thank the Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) for the kind invitation extended to address the Inaugural Session of NIICE Global Conclave, and I wish great success in your deliberations.

Nepal is connected to Sri Lanka for 2610 years, as recorded, since the first visit of Gauthama the Buddha, who was born in Lumbini to the Sakyan dynasty and later became the Buddha - the Enlightened One!

Nepal situated at rooftop of the world is surrounded by the Himalayas, giving birth to natural springs of pure clean water. These waters on their flow down sustain life and nature, before giving into the Indian Ocean, whereby helps create immense wealth for most of South Asia.

Therefore, theme of the Global Conclave is very much relevant and timely. It is timely because it brings all of us, who believe in dialogue and cooperation, together. It offers all of us an important opportunity to reflect on how we could broaden our understanding of the diverse challenges we are faced with today. And how best we could move forward together advancing collective measures, even as the pandemic persists and is bound to cast a long shadow into the future.

The relevance of the theme, however, lies in the evolving contours of a global order that is in the making. There is no doubt that the ground under our feet is shifting though slowly unpredictably in terms of a new orientation.

As I address you today, it is the reality that we are entering a global new norm brought about by the ongoing Covid19 pandemic. Lives, livelihoods, and health of the people around the world have faced with the greatest challenge in one hundred years.

We are all aware that the unprecedented crisis has spilled over to economies of all countries. Especially, developing countries are facing an additional burden in this context. Sri Lanka too has its own share of challenges to contend with.

Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka is pursuing a fresh vision based upon the "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour" the manifesto of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, which received overwhelming mandates from the People of Sri Lanka in November 2019 & August 2020. In accordance the Ministry has adopted "20 Point Key Foreign Policy Directives for 2020 and beyond".

As the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka I had occasions since coming to office, to elaborate and supplement the central thrust of these policy statements. Our highest priority is to maintain friendly relations with all sovereign countries as an equal partner, whilst upholding a policy of neutrality and Non-alignment without being involved in the superpower rivalry.

Sri Lanka as an island nation in the Indian Ocean is situated in one of the most geo-strategic locations between the East and the West. Indian Ocean is the world's third largest, it commands 60% of the world's GDP; sees 80% of the world's ship-borne energy transport through its oceans and; facilitates 46% of the world's merchandise trade. Fifty five percent (55%) of the world's container traffic ply through these waters.

With these comes responsibilities to our People, to the region and the world at large. Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is a founding pillar of our engagement. We see the importance of maintaining freedom in navigation in our seas and air space and protecting sea lines of communication and undersea cables.

Maritime security remains one of our highest priorities amidst increasingly busy international sea lanes in the Indian Ocean. Our Security is not limited to physical security and consequent regional stability, but also encompasses non-traditional security challenges including threats to marine environment. Over exploitation of ocean-based living and natural resources, pollution, threats posed by oil spills and chemicals, acidification of the seas and sea-level rise are also among our concerns.

Distinguished Friends,

We work together with other nations towards the development of the country and the people whilst protecting our sovereignty and territorial integrity. Similarly, we respect sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference on internal affairs of other countries. Mutual respect as well as friendship with all, is the core of our principles of engagement.

Sri Lanka gives utmost priority to the close cooperation between South-Asian countries and similarly with other Asian countries to ensure regional and strategic security.

Sri Lanka is a founder and committed member of Non-Aligned Movement, and the most important pillar of our foreign policy is neutrality and non-alignment.

This month we celebrated 90th year of Universal Suffrage, as one of the foremost Parliamentary Democracies in Asia. Therefore, it is the Will of the People that prevails in making our national policies and decisions. It is this Will which formulates what is best to cooperate in specific areas of national advancement. Where Sri Lanka looks forward to further on closer cooperation with Nepal too.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Government has embarked on a new chapter of socio-economic development. Both Singapore and Dubai had been key Financial centers, whilst there had been a long overdue in between. This will be served by the Colombo International Financial Center based at Colombo Port City.

As Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka I wish to make this the opportunity to request and invite Foreign Investors to come and invest, where we will extend our fullest facilitation. Surely, this will create much greater access not only for Nepal but also to all connected entrepreneurs and investors.

Sri Lanka will continue to explore new investment, trade and employment ventures and opportunities. Our entrepreneurs and professionals have the capacity and skills to contribute to the economic progress of other countries, while bringing benefits for Sri Lanka.

Distinguished Friends,

I must take this opportunity to state categorically that Sri Lanka has always opted for, and has consistently been pursuing, international cooperation and multilateralism for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We engage in constructive dialogue with foreign countries in order to obtain their support for furthering Sri Lanka's interest in the international arena on the environment, sustainable agriculture, and food security, development of human resources, and economic prosperity. We need to work for regional economic integration and enhanced maritime connectivity and trade and culture.

We have the passion and commitment to advance the Blue Economy with the sustainable and responsible use of ocean resources and innovative technologies as important priorities. A proactive climate positive foreign policy is in our national interest, as an island nation prone to climate change and adverse effects.

While Sri Lanka appreciates the role of Nepal as a land-lock in the Himalayas against climate change, we wish to collectively further cooperate with strong commitment towards climate friendly manners and for more clean Oxygen. Furthermore, Sri Lanka has embarked on the journey to achieve 70% of renewable energy generation by 2030.

I trust everyone connected with Nepal Conclave will support our call for international consideration for a debt moratorium, to emerge out of the economic crisis prevailing in most countries owing to the current global pandemic.

Before concluding, it is earnest to mention that Youth, those below 35 years of age consists two-thirds of 1.9 Billion people living in South Asia, and naturally half of them are women. No doubt they will have to manage much better on growing demands of Water, Food, and Land. Therefore, I wish to invite even more socio-economic programs and actions targeting the Youth and Women at all counts. Importantly as of Education - Employment - Environment.

Distinguished Friends,

We are facing unprecedented times that are stressful for us all - a time that challenges our relationships and we have witnessed globally, situations of anger and hostility. We must reject hate and ensure that there is no room for it in our responses.

This is why the Buddha taught us that the goal and the very purpose of one's existence is to serve for the benefit of others - Parattham Patipajjatha –

May blessings of the Buddha - Dhamma - Sangha be with You All !



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 **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**
17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

1 NO POVERTY 	2 ZERO HUNGER 	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	4 QUALITY EDUCATION 	5 GENDER EQUALITY 	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION 
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY 	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 		
13 CLIMATE ACTION 	14 LIFE BELOW WATER 	15 LIFE ON LAND 	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS 		