



Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka  
to the United Nations

## **Media Release**

### **The Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka co-sponsors side event on regional collaboration on political rights for persons with disabilities**

On 15<sup>th</sup> June 2016, the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations co-sponsored a side event organized by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), entitled '*How Regional Collaboration can lead to more effective implementation of political rights of persons with disabilities in the 2030 Development Agenda*' during the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The event discussed the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, and in contributing to realizing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

H.E. Dr. Rohan Perera, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, co-chaired the event along with Mr. Mika Kontiainen, Director of Disability in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Ambassador Perera delivered the welcoming remarks, in which he expressed the significance of the discussion as the implementation stage of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is reached, an agenda which has resolved to 'leave no one behind.' In this context, he stated that it is imperative to promote accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, as envisaged in Goal 16.

In his address Ambassador Perera referred to Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which calls for effective and full participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life on an equal basis. This, he noted, is a principle Sri Lanka subscribes to and is reflected in the Sri Lanka Elections Commission working closely with the representatives of Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and Election Monitoring Agencies to ensure inclusive electoral processes. The Ambassador also referenced the accessible polling stations set up in the Monaragala District of the Uva Province under the

guidance of Mr. Senarath Attanayake, Provincial Councillor of the Uva Province who was a Panelist at the event.

Ambassador Perera also highlighted the importance of regional collaboration, through which States could harness existing mechanisms to cooperate in exchanging experiences and learn from each other. He noted in this regard that the Social Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) called for the society to acknowledge and respond to the consequences of disabilities by securing the legal rights of the individual and to guarantee their political rights. He also stated that the first “South Asia Regional Disability Rights Dialogue on Political Participation” was held in Sri Lanka in October 2015 concurrently with the annual conference of the Forum for South Asian Election Management Bodies (FEMBoSA). These initiatives had resulted in disability access being included in the “Colombo Resolution” calling for disability inclusive elections in South Asia.

Mr. Senarath Attanayake, Provincial Councillor of the Uva Province, delivered a presentation in which he spoke of his personal journey as the first disabled politician in Sri Lanka. Mr. Attanayake, in the course of his presentation stated that during his tenure at the Uva Provincial Council, he has taken efforts to ensure inclusivity and accessibility in the electoral process through projects that provided multiple accessible polling stations for persons with disabilities in Monaragala. The Council also took efforts to ensure that youth with disability are not left behind, by providing self-employment as well as provincial council employment opportunities. He also identified measures taken to engage with the Elections Commission, and with election monitoring bodies, conducting of advocacy campaigns, and also advocating the participation of persons with disabilities in political life, not only as voters. In terms of the way forward he noted that there is still more to be done, in terms of creating awareness, encouraging democratic processes, among others.

Other panelists included Ms. Virginia Atkinson, Senior Access and Inclusion Specialist at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Mr. Setareki Macanawai, CEO of the Pacific Disability Forum, and Mr. Mohammad Ali Loutfy, Executive Director of the Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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New York

15 June 2016