

Chairperson, Secretary General of Commonwealth,

Fellow Health Ministers,

Higher Officials, Invitees and,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning!

First of all, let me appreciate the selection of a vital and an important theme for all the countries, as the theme of the 37<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Health Ministers' meeting (CHMM).

Due to the reason that Health is a fundamental human right, in order to secure an equitable future, it is essential that we invest in health. It is important that you prioritize the problems that have considerable impact on health of nations. In this time, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become one of the priorities in the world and for the Commonwealth, for which an adequate investment is needed.

Non-communicable diseases are responsible for 74% of deaths worldwide. The scenario in most of the Commonwealth countries are the same. In order to get a good impact, you need to invest in key risk factors leading to NCDs. Therefore, investing in primary and primordial prevention for NCDs, is important to reduce future burden due to NCDs, in the Commonwealth countries.

I also support subject areas such as climate change, Universal Health Coverage and to promote healthy aging. Careful planning with data driven decision making combined with sustainable financing, definitely will lead to health equity.

Recently, Sri Lanka has undergone a severe economic downturn. We think that sustainable financing for an equitable Commonwealth includes Human Resources for Health, as it has significant implication on health financing. We experience a serious brain drain of health professionals compounding burden on the health system. I trust that the health professionals, specially doctors in post graduate training in developed countries, should return to serve their motherland as colossal amounts of resources have been spent on them over the years. Therefore, it is timely that we in the Commonwealth come to a consensus among us in commonwealth.

Let us work along these years theme, accompanied by solid plan of action to make a reality for an equitable Commonwealth.

Thank you!