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# Minister of Labour Relations and Productivity Promotions addresses 99th Session of the ILC

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International Labour Organization 99th Session of the International Labour Conference address by Hon Gamini Lokuge Minister of Labour Relations and Productivity Promotions Sri Lanka on 10th June 2010 Geneva Mr. President On behalf of the government and the delegation of Sri Lanka, let me congratulate you and the Vice Presidents on your election to preside over the 99th session of the International Labour Conference. We are meeting again one year after adopting the historic Global Jobs Pact which provided a framework and a resource of practical policies for the multilateral system, governments, workers and employers to recover from the crisis. I believe, it is timely to review the progress made in the implementation of the Global Jobs Pact. In this context, I commend the Report of the Director General entitled "Recovering and Growth with Decent Work", and value highlighting the areas to be focused on crisis response and the way forward to a more stronger, more sustainable and equitable development.

Mr. President Compared to most of the countries, Sri Lanka has been affected marginally by the crisis. The Director General's Report has classified Sri Lanka among the countries which had "slight but positive GDP growth, and in terms of employment, a slight or moderate increase in unemployment rate" during the financial crisis. Despite an almost thirty year civil war, the Asian Tsunami in 2004, and the recent financial crisis, during the past four years, Sri Lanka has recorded an average economic growth of about 5 percent per annum. The success is due to the people-focused policies adopted by the government of His Excellency Mahinda Rajapakse, President of Sri Lanka. The "Mahinda Chinthanaya", the ten year national development strategy of the government, demonstrates the government's commitment in achieving multiple goals of rapid economic growth, employment generation, reduction of poverty accompanied by re-distributive justice, regionally balanced development, and environmental sustainability. Mr. President The recent UNDP Human Development Report 2009 shows that Sri Lanka has made considerable progress in alleviating poverty. During the last five years, poverty has dropped from 23 percent to 15 per cent. The latest MDG data indicates that the country is well on track to achieving the goal of eradicating extreme poverty by 2015 deadline. With the positive sentiments of the global business community coupled with gradual returning of Northern and Eastern Provinces affected by a thirty year war to its economic activities, and the economy entering into a low inflation and low interest rate regime through positive macro economic policies, Sri Lanka has begun to show much prospects, and stimulus to economic activities. Mr. President We have learnt that the impact of the global economic crisis or any other disaster is likely to be a painful reminder for the poor unless reforms are made to the social protection sector. Setting up unemployment benefit schemes, consolidating existing social security systems, increasing coverage to certain segments of workers, enhancing the effectiveness of the existing safety-net schemes are some of the important areas to be addressed in our crisis responses as well as promoting decent work in the country. In this context, as a first measure, I hope to introduce a pension scheme to the members of the Employees Provident Fund using a minimum share of their contributions in order to ensure receipt of a regular income when the workers are out of employment. Mr. President In spite of all our efforts and achievements in social and economic development, Sri Lanka cannot be complacent with what has been achieved in terms of sustainable development. However, in all our achievements the support and cooperation received from our social partners should be commended. The role played by the social partners during the financial crisis endorses the view expressed by the ILO Director General in his Report, that social dialogue is a key to achieve sustainable recovery. In conclusion, I wish to endorse fully that the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for Fair Globalization would be an effective tool to guide the policies and actions of the member countries, as well as the ILO. In this context, we think that the ILO should enhance its capacity and become more innovative in their approach. Thank you.