

Statement by Hon. Vasantha Senanayake, State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka and Head of the Sri Lanka Delegation at 24th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting, 7th August, 2017, Manila, Philippines

**Your Excellency Alan Cayetano / Secretary General Min
Excellency's, Distinguished Delegates,**

It is indeed my honour to lead the Sri Lanka Delegation at this August Assembly. Let me at the outset congratulate the chair for the astute leadership and excellent arrangements made for this Regional Forum in Manila.

This 24th ARF marks a significant milestone as it coincides with the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN. It is also significant to Sri Lanka as it celebrates the 10th Anniversary of becoming a participant of ARF in August 2007 in the same beautiful city of Manila.

The ARF has achieved considerable progress in creating awareness and dialogue in matters under its purview. Sri Lanka values the opportunity to be a partner in this, and looks forward to becoming a future Sectoral Dialogue Partner. Sri Lanka has formally conveyed her interest in this regard to the Secretary General, and seeks the support of the ASEAN Member States.

As we take stock of emerging challenges and security concerns, the relevance of the ARF is more acutely felt. Our responses to such challenges, therefore, require greater commitment for concerted action.

Terrorism and the emerging reality of violent extremism remains a perilous factor. The root causes of terrorism and extremism are complex and need to be grasped fully and strategies to combat such phenomena need to be developed. Terrorism should never however be equated or associated with either ethnicity or religion. Sri Lanka condemns terrorism in all its ugly forms and manifestations.

Sri Lanka believes that military action alone is insufficient to address the issue of violent extremism and that rehabilitation and reconciliation where appropriate, ought to be considered.

Sri Lanka, being an island nation in proximity to one of the busiest sea lanes in the world, is very concerned about maritime security. Sri Lanka hopes to play a constructive role in ensuring maritime security, maritime safety, marine conservation and in addressing other related issues. In this regard, Sri Lanka would encourage close cooperation and coordination among navies and maritime law enforcement authorities of ARF participant countries in unitedly combatting nefarious activities of international criminal syndicates including drug trafficking, piracy and terrorism.

In this context, I am pleased to inform that Sri Lanka will host the **2nd Indian Ocean Conference – IOC 2017** in Colombo from 31 August – 2nd September, 2017. The Conference will deliberate on how to create a zone of shared security, prosperity and development in the Indian Ocean Region. It will focus on defence, economic, cultural and environmental matters with participation of over 30 countries.

Sri Lanka shares concerns regarding the issue of people smuggling and remains committed to supporting regional mechanisms including the Bali Process.

Disaster Management and Response has become an important area for cooperation in the region due to the increase in the intensity and frequency of natural disasters. Sri Lanka experienced a prolonged drought in some regions and floods and landslides in others. We are grateful for the assistance received from the international community in this connection. We suggest continuous exchange of weather forecasting among countries of the region as a useful measure. Sri Lanka welcomes the signing of the "ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region" by ASEAN leaders at the 28th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane.

As to the situation in the Korean Peninsula, we stress the importance of discontinuing military provocations as manifested recently by the launching of long-range missiles in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions. Such actions have also threatened the Security and peace of neighboring nations such as Japan.

In the interest of the region and the world at large, we urge the DPRK to refrain from activities which impact adversely on the stability of regional and world peace. We support President Moon's Berlin Initiative which aims to improve inter-Korea relations and to realize lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula.

The 24th ARF has given us an opportunity to review constructively and renew our commitment to further advancing the ARF Process. We unreservedly support this process and reaffirm our commitment to it.

Sri Lanka looks forward to contributing the realization of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

I thank you.