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Message on Dr. Saman Kelegama by the Ministry of Development Strategies & International Trade

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CT By 2017-06-26

Dr. Saman Kelegama, being an eminent economist and erudite scholar in Sri Lanka, provided insightful advocacy and guidance in the execution of the tasks of the government on the wider economic arena of international trade under the Committee of the proposed Agency for International Trade, which has been established by the government with the prime objective of synchronizing the trade and investment nexus in the economic policy agenda of the government to benefit people of the country through new employment opportunities and increased income.

Articulation and implementation of the trade policy has been historically scattered and spread over many agencies. This mostly resulted in the development of ad-hoc and often conflicting rules, regulations and practices affecting adversely the expansion of trade and ensuring only a few benefit from international trade. Dr. Kelegama provided the required leadership in the Committee which included the heads of all trade related agencies of the government and representatives of the private sector in the Committee of International Trade to bring all inter-related policy as well as cross-institutional elements to a single platform. Formulation of new trade policy, negotiation of preferential trade agreements, creation of a national export promotion strategy, introducing the much awaited in-house legislative and regulatory mechanism related to international trade of Sri Lanka, strengthening trade facilitation,

and the introduction of the required modalities to address internal and external non-tariff measures have been some of the salient initiatives undertaken in the relatively shorter period of his tenure since December 2015. Using his strong research capabilities he was also instrumental in preparing a number of studies on the costs and benefits of FTAs, and has guided the relevant agencies to undertake several initiatives such as reforming the standards and regulations related to imports & exports and developing a trade liberalization programme for Sri Lanka under various FTAs. This has led to the formulation of a mechanism to prepare negative list/sensitive list on an objectively driven systematic economic criteria for the first time ever getting underway.

Dr. Kelegama's professional engagement with the ministry was in addition to his role at the Institute Policy Studies as Executive Director, the position he held until his demise. His long-term collaborations as a member of the professional networks facilitated by World Bank, ADB, UNDP, UNIDO, ILO, UN-ESCAP, Commonwealth Secretariat and the deliberations made at a wider range of international fora, his international experience as one of the top regional trade economists with reputation and recognition among academia, research community and policymakers and his life-long grip as a fulltime Sri Lankan professional living in the country has been advantageous in negotiating the country specific elements.

The enormous contribution made by Dr. Kelegama to the enhancement of international trade will benefit the country.

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