

**Welcome Address at National Consultation Workshop on Key Challenges and Opportunities for Food Security Policies in Sri Lanka Organized by the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 16th-17th July, 2015 at IPS Auditorium**

Mr. B. Wijayarathne, Secretary Ministry of Agriculture,  
Dr. Rohan Wijekoon, Director General, Department of Agriculture,  
Dr. P.K. Joshi, Director- South Asia- IFPRI,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome all of you to the “National Consultation Workshop on Key Challenges and Opportunities for Food Security Policies in Sri Lanka” jointly organized by the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

We are pleased to have Dr. Wijekoon as our Chief Guest and Mr. Wijayarathne as our guest of honour and I would like to thank you both for joining us today, despite your busy schedules. I also welcome Dr. P.K. Joshi of the South Asian Office of the International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington and Mr. W.C. Dheerasekera, Project Consultant to this workshop.

The world is on the verge of identifying a new development framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which will expire this year. Under MDGs, Halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger was one of the three targets under Goal 1 that called for ending poverty and hunger. During the Rio+20 summit, the United Nations Secretary General pointed out that, despite bold steps taken by the world community, the world still has close to one billion hungry people. He called for governments, private sector, farmers, scientists, civil society and consumers to work together to achieve the challenge of ‘Zero Hunger’ by eliminating all forms of hunger, developing inclusive and sustainable food systems, and eliminating food waste.

Needless to say, the fight against hunger has been a key objective of development efforts in Sri Lanka. Based on the Global Hunger Index 2014, the depth of hunger for Sri Lanka in 2014 was 216 kcal/capita/day, indicating a medium level of food deficit among undernourished children. The greater the deficit, the greater the susceptibility to health risks related to undernourishment. The share of Sri Lanka's undernourished population was 24.6 per cent, in 2013. Moreover, the share of underweight children less than 5 years of age was 26.3 per cent, stunted children was 14.7 per cent and wasted children was 21.4 per cent – all these figures are for the year 2013. Indeed these figures are far from satisfactory.

Therefore, the important question arises as to what the post-2015 food security agenda for Sri Lanka should be ?. The challenge for the country is not just to ensure food security of the people currently undernourished, but also to feed additional 2.4 million people expected to inhabit the island by 2050. As the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 called for, eliminating food insecurity. This will require, a holistic approach that promotes sustainable agriculture while ensuring economic viability of farm operations and environmental sustainability which was drafted under the Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 2 is “End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”.

In this backdrop, the IPS along with the IFPRI brings together different teams composed of professionals from agriculture, trade, health, finance, education and nutrition sections from various Ministries, universities, private sector, NGOs and civil society. These stakeholders are brought together to facilitate a dialogue on the key challenges and opportunities for food security in Sri Lanka and provide the

basis for the formation of a solid food security policy framework for the country. By working together and supporting sustainable agricultural development, I am confident that we can not only improve the food security of those who are hungry, but also create new opportunities to mitigate the future vulnerabilities of the people in hunger. Therefore, I hope this effort will not be one-off exercise; rather this will be the stepping stone for future series of collaborative activities towards achieving the goal of zero hunger.

I must express my thanks to Dr. Joshi in helping of us making this national consultation workshop a reality, Mr. Dheersekera in coordinating the workshop with the IPS team and all my colleagues under the leadership of Dr. Manoj Tibbatuwewa for organizing the workshop.

Finally, let me once again welcome all of you once again to this important national consultation on food security and thank all of you for being here.

I hope you all will have productive two days of deliberations and the outcome of the workshop will not get unnoticed in future exercises of food policy formulations.

I thank you.