Remarks by
Hon. Mangala Samaraweera, MP
Minister of Foreign Affairs

UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Una McCauley
Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

• Thank you very much for accepting the joint invitation from the UN and this Ministry to be here this morning.

• As you are all probably aware, soon after the Presidential Election in January last year, I met the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon in New York on 13 February. At that meeting, I explained to him, the vision of the new Government under the leadership of President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, to strengthen democracy, and achieve reconciliation and development.

• I explained that this challenging journey is not one that Sri Lanka can undertake on its own, and that we would require the help of the
international community including the United Nations and our bilateral partners.

- We also sought assistance from the UN Peacebuilding Fund which was approved by the Secretary-General.

- Since then, as you are all aware, we co-sponsored the Resolution titled ‘Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’ which was adopted unanimously by the Human Rights Council on 1 October last year. This saw the end of the years of confrontation and disengagement that Sri Lanka had unfortunately become famous for, at the Human Rights Council, in the years following the conclusion of the conflict in 2009.

- I must thank all of you, and through you, your respective Governments, for the support that has been extended, and continues to be extended to Sri Lanka, in its challenging yet important and historic journey to strengthen our democracy, achieve economic prosperity, reconciliation and durable peace.

- We have been working closely with the UN Resident Coordinator and her staff in the months following the adoption of the Resolution, to evolve a comprehensive ‘Peacebuilding Priority Plan’, based on national priorities, which could serve as a common framework for support by the Peacebuilding Fund of the UN, as well as other development partners.

- Of course for a Government that has a myriad challenges before it – including reconciliation, economic and infrastructure development,
livelihood support, strengthening democracy and the rule of law, administrative and political reform, economic policy reform, and combating corruption – everything seems a priority.

- However, working with the UN, we have tried to identify a set of priorities that are related to the task of Peacebuilding. I am sure that Una will explain in her remarks, the details of the process that has been followed.

- A Peacebuilding Fund Board was set up which includes representatives from key Government Ministries, the Governors and Chief Secretaries of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, Civil Society, the diplomatic community, the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation, and the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM). Unfortunately, the Secretary-General of the SCRM is not here with us today as he is overseas, but he has, and will continue to play an important role in the process of implementation of the Peacebuilding Priority Plan.

- Consultations have been held on developing the Plan, with civil society representatives in different parts of the country.

- The main Peacebuilding Priority Plan Framework will focus on the 4 areas of:
  - Transitional Justice
  - Reconciliation
  - Good Governance, and
- Finding durable solutions for the resettlement of the Internally Displaced.

- On Transitional Justice, as you are aware, the Government stated its intentions to set up a Permanent Office on Missing Persons, a Commission for Truth-seeking, an Office for Reparations, and a Judicial Mechanism.

- Working closely with the ICRC, we have already drafted the necessary legislation for the establishment of the Office on Missing Persons which was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The draft law is now before Parliament. There are several areas in the operationalization phase of the Office on Missing Persons, where we would require your support. This includes training of investigators, forensic experts, setting up of the victim and witness protection unit of the Office, and expertise in data collation and analysis. The SCRM will soon start working with relevant experts to identify the specific needs and requirements so that we could then discuss with you regarding possible support.

- Public consultations are being carried out at the moment, led by the Task Force for Consultations headed by Ms. Manouri Muttetuweegama, to seek the views of all stakeholders, on the other mechanisms, namely, the truth-seeking commission, the judicial mechanism and the reparations office. The Secretariat, together with experts, will draw up a Transitional Justice Strategy, which would involve sequencing of the setting up of the different mechanisms. The design of mechanisms will
take place once the consultations conclude and the Report on the consultations is handed over to Government.

- On each of the mechanisms – especially their setting up, and operationalization and functioning, we would require the assistance of our bilateral partners. Neither the expertise and skills required, nor the costs that would be involved in these processes, can be sourced only from local means alone.

- The Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) that is headed by former President Chandika Kumaratunga will take the lead on project based reconciliation activities including the drafting of a National Policy on Reconciliation. The Ministry of National Dialogue, and the State Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation will also play an important role in this aspect.

- Good Governance in Peacebuilding would include support for strengthening provincial administration; the independent commissions; encouraging greater participation of women; constitutional and legislative reforms; public sector reform; and security sector reform.

- On support for finding durable solutions for resettlement, there is already a policy which has been drawn up that is currently before the Cabinet of Ministers. Support for resettlement would also include de-mining, mine-risk awareness, providing basic services such as safe-water, sanitation, education, health facilities, and also livelihood support.
Something that I keep stressing on consistently is the link between ‘economic development and peacebuilding’. The two are intertwined. A key ingredient for achieving reconciliation and ensuring the success of political and administrative reform is economic development. People count on the Government to deliver an economic peace dividend. They demand quick results and a perceived improvement in their lives, especially in terms of salaries and jobs. Livelihood support, skills development, employment generation, improved living standards, better healthcare and education, better access to markets for farmers and traders – these are all essential to ensure the success of our nation’s journey towards durable peace and prosperity.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, this is not a journey that we can undertake and succeed in alone, and we look to you to join us in this historic journey and be partners in the peacebuilding and development programme of our country.