

**Statement**

**By**

**H.E Mahinda Rajapaksa**

**President of the Democratic Socialist Republic  
of Sri Lanka**



President of the UNCSD,  
Secretary General of the UN  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here in Rio de Janeiro and to share my thoughts at this momentous event. The presence of so many Heads of State and Governments, Senior Ministers, Officials and thousands of members of Civil Society is a confirmation of the importance all of us attach to this occasion.
2. I also wish to extend the appreciation of my Government to Her Excellency, President Madam Dilma Vana Rousseff of Brazil, her Government and people for hosting Rio+20 and the warm hospitality accorded.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Twenty years ago, the world leaders laid the foundation for sustainable development by adopting the Rio principles, agenda 21, and thereby steering the discourse of this important phenomenon on the pillars of economic and social development and environmental protection. Since then, the international community and national governments have made continuous efforts to implement these universal agreements. We observe that many important steps have been taken in promoting the harmonious development of the economy, population growth, resources and environment. However, the population of the world reaching 7 billion and the needs of humanity multiplying at an exponential rate, have already become ever increasing challenges for many of us developing states.
4. Longstanding problems such as poverty, hunger, mismanagement of resources in addition to climate change, fresh water shortage, energy crisis and the spread of communicable as well as non-communicable diseases have emerged in this globalized world adding to the plight of developing countries. At the same time,



we have witnessed an unprecedented level of environment degradation, which is proving to be irreversible, due to unsustainable production and consumption patterns of a handful of developed countries. It is therefore our solemn responsibility to meet the increasing needs of our people, especially those of the less privileged who have for too long been outsiders, at the overloaded table enjoyed by the developed countries.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Sri Lanka has applied the concept of sustainable development as far back as 2000 years ago and achieved remarkable results. The agrarian economy shaped by the ancient Kingdoms in Sri Lanka was very much connected with management of the environment, disciplined society and economic development. Because of this harmonious practice adopted by our ancestors, we achieved not only environment and economic sustainability, but also social and political stability. The respect for forests and all living beings was not only deeply rooted in the moral and legal codes of ancient administration, but was also part of our way of life. I would add that environmental issues such as global warming are of particular concern to island nations.
6. A cardinal principle governing the behaviour of nations in the modern world should be recognition of the principle that the resources of a country, whether on land or in the oceans, belong to the people of that country. Their enjoyment of these resources for the improvement of their economic and social condition should in no way be hampered by encroachment on these resources by external interests. Protection of the sea bed and ocean floor against damage by the use of environment unfriendly methods of fishing, such as bottom trawling, should be guaranteed by international law and practice, by means of effective remedies.
7. The overriding principle which must be recognized in full measure by all nations is that preventing abuse of the environment. I am reminded of a landmark judgment from the history of our country that teaches every citizen the



importance of the preservation and nurturing of the environment. In the historic first sermon of the Arahata Mahinda, a disciple of the Buddha, King Devanampiyatissa was told that the latter was only a trustee of the land and environment and had no right to destroy these assets which rightfully belong to future generations.

8. These core principles remain at the centre of our national thinking. Today, owing to the rapid economic growth that my country is experiencing after ending a three-decade long terrorist conflict on our soil, and amidst post conflict challenges, Sri Lanka is well on its way to full economic development. During the last few years, we were able to maintain the country's economic growth at the rate of 8% and our per capita income reached US\$ 2400. We have been able to weather the international economic shocks caused by the recent financial crisis because of domestic policies, such as Gama Neguma, Divi Neguma and Api Wawamu-Rata Nagamu, all contained in the Mahinda Chintana, the policy document of the government, aimed at achieving self sufficiency and development of the rural and agricultural economy.
9. Sri Lanka is poised to become a knowledge based regional hub for export driven trade and commerce, as the country's infrastructure is being rapidly developed and investment opportunities are flourishing.
10. We have attained all these economic gains while preserving and protecting the environment through our development policies. As a result, our per capita carbon emission is a mere 0.6 tons per annum which is insignificant in comparison to most countries. I say with great pride that our development model is home grown and one which respects the environment.





Excellencies,

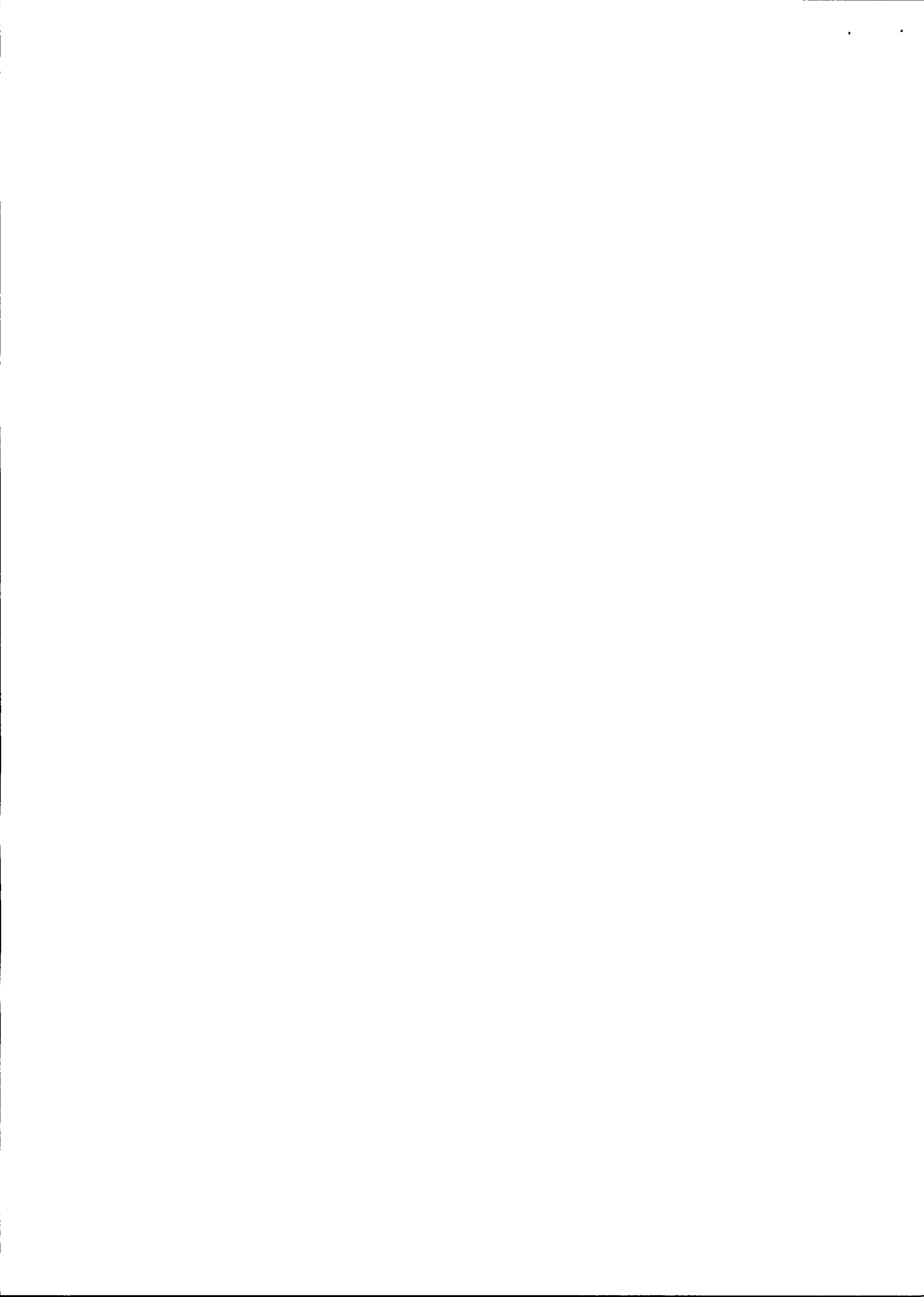
Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. As an emerging economy, the challenge for Sri Lanka is to achieve sustainable high economic growth with greater equity, whilst integrating into the process of globalization. Therefore, macro-economic policies that we set forth today at this conference must be developed through a framework which includes environmental sensitivity, but without hindering the development space for countries that are developing. Without awareness of the stages of economic development, imposing various barriers and compliance with standards of environment will hamper the efforts of developing countries in achieving growth. We recall that our development partners have made commitments at the highest level with regard to technological transfer and financial cooperation. These must be honoured for developing countries to achieve and surpass their MDG goals. In this context, all forms of development partnerships must be explored to strike an optimal balance among the three pillars of sustainable development.

Excellencies,

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12. Addressing the environmental crisis should not be a burden for the developing countries alone. The developed countries which largely contribute to the environmental crisis, cannot and should not leave the responsibility of saving the environment to developing countries, at the cost of their economic development. Transition to a green economy is one among many tools that could minimize unsustainable consumption and production practices. On the other hand, transition to a green economy must not generate negative externalities to slow down the growth of social and economic development of a country. The solution for sustainable development, therefore, should derive from a concept that encapsulates poverty eradication, resource and energy efficiency, equity and better living standards for all the people.



Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. All people desire a prosperous and peaceful life. They also wish to see that the concept of sustainable development becomes a practical reality. These aspirations present an opportunity for us to make earnest efforts to strike a balance between the interest of maintaining harmony between “man and nature” with that of “the environment and development”. Sri Lanka believes that Rio+20 is an excellent opportunity to determine our future goals and establish a road map for sustainable development based on the Rio principles, in particular, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. I believe that a solution for this crisis requires a new global economic order which is fair and equitable including debt relief, fair trade and external funding. Any tool in this regard should respect the purposes and principles already enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and other Conventions on the Environment. It should not undermine the sovereignty of States over their natural resources.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. Sri Lanka stands ready to shoulder its responsibilities and honour its commitments. We must not disappoint our future generations by failing to agree on a balanced outcome today. It is the right and the destiny of our children to have a better future. I fervently hope that this conference would live up to this responsibility.

May the Triple Gem bless you!

Thank you.

