

## **Opening Remarks**

### **National Capacity Building Workshop “Strengthening Business Digitization and Product Promotion among Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) for Accelerating Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sri Lanka”**

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Colombo, Sri Lanka

Mrs. Thilaka Jayasundara, Secretary, Ministry of Industries,

Ms. Simrin Singh, Country Director, International Labour Organization,

Mr. Deepal Nelson, President, National Chamber of Commerce,

Distinguished delegates,

Representatives of the MSME sector in Sri Lanka,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today at the national capacity building workshop on “Strengthening Business Digitization and Product Promotion among Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) for Accelerating Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sri Lanka”.

First, I would like to start by thanking the Secretary and senior officials from the Ministry of Industries, as well as my colleagues from the United Nations Country Team in Sri Lanka. Your presence demonstrates the high-level commitment to the critical issue of unlocking the full potentials of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels. Second, I would like to thank the participating MSME entrepreneurs and policymakers in this workshop. I encourage and expect your active engagement and insightful discussions over the next four days. Through your active participations,

I believe you will enhance your skills and knowledge that will support the resilience of your businesses, especially when the world is grappling with so many challenges that have impacted your abilities to run businesses efficiently, as they have reduced the number of customers and disrupted your supply chains. The reason why Mrs. Secretary, her team and my colleagues decided to come and be with you this week is because both the Government of Sri Lanka and the United Nations believe in what you do. The small enterprises that you run are strong engines for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, especially goals relating to employment creation, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and reductions in inequality. You are all witnesses to the power of MSMEs not only as job creators, but also as incubators for entrepreneurship and innovations in the various communities you live in.

In his message to the United Nations' Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Day that was held on 27 June 2023, the United Nations Secretary-General urged the world to commit and support MSMEs in "*making the Sustainable Development Goals a reality*". It is therefore important that the Government of Sri Lanka and its development partners that include the United Nations system have joined hands and are actively supporting MSMEs. This support will not only strengthen MSME capacities, but also will ensure that MSMEs contribute to inclusive growth and expand shared prosperity in Sri Lanka.

Despite their important roles, MSMEs are vulnerable to economic shocks and uncertainties. According to the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, during the Covid-19 pandemic, MSMEs in developing countries were hit the most, especially those owned by women, youth and groups in vulnerable situations. Even before the pandemic, MSMEs are often left with few avenues to access to affordable credit and market opportunities. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing challenges and further threatened to overwhelm MSMEs' coping capacities. Compared to large and formalized enterprises, MSMEs are less able to formulate business plans in preparation for uncertainties. Likewise, they suffer from limited access to economic stimulus packages and subsidies launched to support businesses during times of crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The journey for building forward better from the Covid-19 pandemic requires not only sustained policy support. It also calls for concrete measures that strengthen MSME capacities and entrepreneurial skills, especially in the era of digital economy. I am therefore glad that you all took time from your families, businesses, and offices to spend some time with the professional trainer team from the National Chamber of Commerce. I am sure they will do a fantastic job to impart cutting-edge knowledge and skills that will help you run your enterprises better and, in the process, increase your productivity, and promote the quality and sales of products that you offer.

At this moment, I would like to sincerely thank the support of the Ministry of Industries, the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office and the United Nations Country Team in Sri Lanka for supporting the project on “Strengthening national capacities for enhancing MSME resilience and building forward better to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in developing countries”, under which the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is the lead implementing entity. With funding support from the United Nations Peace and Development Fund, this project will be implemented in Sri Lanka together with eight other developing countries participating in the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) in Africa and Asia, from 2022 to 2024. Together with the Ministry of Industries and the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office, we look forward to achieving impactful results from this project, in close alignment with priorities identified in the Sri Lanka – United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2023-2027).

Ladies and gentlemen, although this capacity building workshop takes place in only four days, I believe the learning journey you have embarked on will help you realize your full potential. We expect each one of you to share the knowledge and skills you have learned in Colombo with your communities in your respective districts. You all constitute crucial building blocks for enhancing MSME resilience and elevating MSME contributions to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.

I thank you for your attention and wish the workshop the best success.

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