

Statement on Sri Lanka VNR 2022 delivered by a representative of the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism

On behalf of the 'civil society and other stakeholders' of Sri Lanka, I would like to present the realities of the Sri Lankan people living amidst a national crisis of many dimensions, which has aggravated the Country's systemic and non-systemic struggles with sustainable development transformation.

Limited streamlining of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan and methodology for formulating the VNR, with the participatory and data driven requirements of the 2030 agenda has concealed the collective, derailing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the present economic crisis, lack of responsible and progressive fiscal policy management, politico-constitutional turmoil, weak environmental governance and food insecurity on the country's sustainable development transformation.

We believe that we owe it to the citizens of Sri Lanka whose daily existence has now become a struggle, to report the truth: our systems, processes and everyday lives are far from the envisioned 2030 sustainable development transformation.

The civil society on behalf of all non-state development actors remind the government of Sri Lanka of their duty to protect and facilitate civil society spaces which allows all stakeholders to take ownership over the Country's transformation towards sustainable development and to achieve the system change demanded by the people of Sri Lanka. Leaving no one behind and meaningful participation must be more than a tick box reporting slogan, and a core value of Sri Lanka's governance systems.

Though Sri Lanka was one of the first countries in the region to set up a dedicated Sustainable Development state portfolio, the absence of political and administrative commitment to prioritise the achievement of the SDGs, has led to disintegrated efforts at a central government level which leave behind sub-national authorities from the transformation processes. Volatility in policy due to the politicisation of national action plans, ever changing ministerial portfolios, dependence on manual data systems and limited capacities in the state sector for data centred governance, has led to systems which cannot facilitate the envisioned transformation in the Country. Mainstreamed approaches to sustainable development amongst state and non-state actors are linear and based on institutional and individual objectives. This has converted Sri Lanka's sustainable development journey into a goal dominated process rather than an inter-linkages based commitment.

Sri Lanka is at a stage where we have to commit ourselves in pursuing sustainable development transformation, by combining local leadership commitment with unbiased global support, with the aim of achieving people and planetary development justice. The Sri Lankan government, non-state stakeholders and the public citizens must take collective ownership of the transformation and its localisation; to make sustainable development a daily commitment rather than a beautiful mirage of idealistic change we strive to experience.