

SPEECH-VIETNAM COOPERATIVE CONFERENCE-APRIL 17-18 IN HANOI

Ms Monique Leroux, President of International Cooperative Alliance

All other, distinguished vice presidents and, representatives of International Cooperative Alliance

Senior party members, and officials of, Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Distinguished and Visiting Cooperative Ministers, from across the world

Visiting members and representatives of, the global cooperative movement

All other distinguished participants

Ladies and gentlemen

I bring warm greetings, from the people, and the cooperatives sector, of Sri Lanka, to you, on this occasion, of the, 10th Asia & Pacific Cooperative Ministers Conference.

This is a very important, conference held under, the invitation of, International Cooperative Alliance.

This event is actually, a good opportunity to, extend the cooperative activities, and to share experiences, of the cooperative movements, of the participating countries.

This event is themed, around Sustainable Development Goals, and Promoting Stronger Partnerships, between Government and, Co-operative Stakeholders. In fact, As the Minister, in charge of, Sri Lankan cooperative sector, I stress that, this is a timely theme,

specially for Sri Lanka, since at present, we are, reaching the final stages of, our national, cooperatives policy formulation work.

Ladies and gentlemen

The cooperative movement, please allow me to share, a brief history of, Sri Lanka's cooperative movement today.

Sri Lanka cooperative movement started, under British colonial rulers.

Sri Lanka is the second country, where the cooperative movement, began under the, British rulers.

They introduced the, cooperative system, to India first under, a framework, called "British India cooperative Pattern."

Sri Lanka's First Cooperative Society, was formed in 1906, in the central province.

The same British rulers, gave the first legal framework, for cooperative movement, under the ordinance No. 07 of 1911, for the Credit Cooperative Societies. Since then, cooperation between the, government and the, cooperative movement, continued to expand. In 1930, establishment of, Department of Cooperatives, took place and in 1945, it was transformed to, the Department of Cooperative Development.

After decades of socio-political changes, today Sri Lanka's cooperative sector, is not centralized anymore, but, is a devolved subject.

As a result, there are, 09 Provincial Cooperative Ministers, and 09 Departments of Cooperative Development, 09 Provincial Cooperative Employees Commissions, functioning under, the provincial councils, across the country.

I wish to stress that, some National level cooperatives and societies, are under, my Ministry of Industry and Commerce along with, the national Cooperative Employees Commission, and the National Institute of Cooperative Development.

In my capacity, as the subject Minister, of the Central Government, I wish to mention, that national cooperative policy formulation, is a key responsibility, for me.

We are always working, in collaboration and cooperation, with the Provincial Ministers, Provincials Department of Cooperative and the Provincial level Cooperative Employees Commissions, to develop the cooperative movement.

And also, we have taken action, to formulate the, long awaited, national cooperative policy, with the Provincial Cooperative Ministers, and Provincial Departments of Cooperative Development.

We have initiated many welfare programs through the cooperative movement in Sri Lanka.

In promoting good relationship between the government and the cooperative movement, attention should be paid, to evaluate the, cooperative system properly, since it is an independent economic system, away from government, and private sector.

At times, we may need to, support the cooperative movements officially, for it to survive, in today's competitive market.

Understanding and cooperation, between the government and, the cooperative movement will be, further strengthened, in respect of the principles, and values, to safeguard the cooperative movement.

This conference is, looking forward to, the 2030 targets.

I stress that, we can achieve, our national Sustainable Development Goals easily, if the government and, the cooperative movement work together, paying attention to, relevant factors, such as gender and youth.

At present, a main topic of, the development discussion in, the South Asian Countries, is the gender issue. We can formulate, and implement women empowerment programs, in collaboration with the, cooperative movement, so that we leverage, it towards the success of an SDG.

Currently among the leaders, and top management level officers, women representation is, notably very poor. Since Sri Lanka's cooperatives, are active in, agricultural, consumer, production, health services, industries, women and youth sectors, it can support SDGs, as a community based movement.

My Ministry, with the support of International Labour Organisation, is striving to, finalise Sri Lanka's, first national cooperatives policy, to serve the more than, 14500 cooperatives, across the country.

We believe that, once our policy formulation work is completed, Sri Lanka's cooperative movement, can support the achievement of, Sustainable Development Goals, even faster and better. Another reason, that we believe that the cooperative movement, of Sri Lanka, could be used towards, SDGs is that, the strength of the movement. Sri Lanka's total population, is around 21 million. Of this, almost 8 million Sri Lankans, are a member of some form, of a cooperative, active in the country.

Therefore, I do not have any doubts that, the lessons we take home, from today's event here, would become valuable inputs, to the future of Sri Lanka's co-operatives.

Finally, thanking the International Co-operative Alliance, co-operative Ministers and Leaders of the region and also to the Vietnam Cooperative Alliance, for inviting to join this event, listening to me, I also wish you all, great success and good luck, from this event.

Thank you.