

**Press Statement of Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena Foreign Minister at the Joint Press event  
with Hon. Michael Pompeo, US Secretary of State**

Hon Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State,  
Hon Tharaka Balasuriya, State Minister  
Madam Ambassador,  
Members of the Delegation

Mr. Secretary Firstly I wish to welcome you and your delegation to Sri Lanka in this warm and pleasant weather amidst your busy schedule.

Tomorrow, the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 marks the significant milestone of the 72nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, and the United States of America.

So indeed is a very important day and a visit Secretary of State that you have taken to be with us.

For over seven decades, our two countries have nurtured a strong relationship, founded on shared values of democracy and Socio-economic orientation. The relations between our peoples go back to mid 1800s, pre-dating the formal establishment of diplomatic relations. Over the years, this engagement has significantly matured into a multifaceted relationship, covering political, economic, educational, cultural and defence spheres including maritime matters. Equally important, the People to People interactions between our two nations.

In this context, it gives me immense pleasure in extending to you, my esteemed counterpart from the United States, Hon. Michael Pompeo, warm and cordial welcome to Sri Lanka. The fact that you have chosen to visit Sri Lanka, despite formidable challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic; dedicating your time and sharing your insight; is heart-warming Excellency.

Your wide-ranging discussions with His Excellency President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and our own discussions have generated a renewed momentum to the conversations with key American interlocutors have had with Sri Lankan leaders over the past months this year.

Mr. Secretary, you are visiting Sri Lanka at a historic moment. The world is challenged with the COVID-19 pandemic of unimaginable proportions affecting our lives, livelihoods and relations across borders. In the 1930s, the John Hopkins University commissioned the study to develop then Ceylon's Public and Community Health System which contributed towards Sri Lanka's successful health system. American personality such as Buddhist Theosophist, Educational Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, hailing from New Jersey, made immense contributions to the advancement of Buddhism and education in the country.

Mr. Secretary, Sri Lanka is the oldest democracy in Asia where citizens have enjoyed universal franchise for almost 90 years. From a more dynamic perspective, it is also a time in Sri Lanka where the democratic ethos and practice have stood strong, with the Sri Lankan people resoundingly expressing their free choice through two major electoral processes of Presidential

and Parliamentary elections. These elections reflect the people's mandate to safeguard the Unitary State, Sovereignty, Territorial-Integrity, national security and economic progress, presenting a clear opportunity for all friendly nations, especially for the United States to join in our forward journey for a stable, secure country with economic advancement.

The United States is one of Sri Lanka's major development partners with over US\$ 2 billion worth of development assistance in wide-ranging areas including: Agriculture, Environment, Natural Resources, Health, Education, Business Development, Trade, and Humanitarian Assistance.

The US remained Sri Lanka's largest single market with exports of US\$ 3.1 billion in 2019 and even in the present context of COVID-19 related market downturn remains in a similar position with US\$ 1.1 billion for the 1st half of this year.

The US has been a friend and assisting Sri Lanka in times of difficulty and we remain deeply grateful for your support. US assistance to Sri Lanka after the Asian Tsunami in 2004 was significant. I recall the visits of former President George Bush (Senior) and former President Bill Clinton; the assistance in the aftermath of Easter-Sunday terrorists attacks in April 2019; and, most recently for COVID-19 mitigation. Especially, I also extend my sincere thanks and appreciation once again for proscribing the LTTE terrorist organization even before the 9/11 attacks and up to now.

As we go along Mr. Secretary Today's discussions are a continuation of interactions of H.E. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa with key US interlocutors and dialogue which took place virtually between myself and Secretary Pompeo few months ago. It has been an opportunity for both sides to understand each other's priorities, share insights and consider steps to further elevating bilateral engagement on agreed areas of cooperation.

In furtherance of making our bilateral engagement more robust, we have agreed to convene the next session of the US-SL Partnership Dialogue 4 in early 2021, and also progress on several areas including economic, defence and research through intensified coordination. Next session of the Joint Council of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement [TIFA] will also be convened at the earliest possible timeframe.

It was also considered opportune to broaden our bilateral engagement in areas such as ICT, Cyber Security, Agriculture, Science, Technology, Innovations, Trade, Investment, Business and Climate Change.

As a Sovereign, Free, Independent nation Sri Lanka's foreign policy will remain neutral. Non-Aligned and Friendly. Conscious of the opportunities and responsibilities that come with our strategic location, we see the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation in our seas and air space also protecting sea lines of communication and the undersea cables. We believe all countries should adhere to and respect international law, including UN Convention on Law of the Sea [UNCLOS]. We share views on the potential multifaceted Maritime cooperation which Sri Lanka is keen to progress.

Secretary Pompeo's visit and the discussions have further enhanced our warm and friendly relations and once again I extend my grateful thanks to you, Secretary Pompeo.

Finally, let me wish Secretary Pompeo and Mrs. Pompeo who is joining him on this visit, a very pleasant stay in Sri Lanka and safe travel in Asia in the next few days.

On behalf of the People of Sri Lanka I wish you AYU-BOWAN

And I give the floor to Secretary of State, Hon. Michael Pompeo.