

Statement by Hon. H. M. Vijitha Herath, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment, and Tourism at the conclusion of bilateral talks with Hon Winston Peters, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand

Your Excellency, the Right Honourable Winston Peters, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand,

Distinguished members of the New Zealand and Sri Lanka delegations

It is indeed an honour and great pleasure to welcome New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters who is on an official visit to Sri Lanka, leading a high level delegation.

His visit marks the highest-level engagement from New Zealand in recent times. The first, in fact, since the establishment of a resident diplomatic mission in Colombo in 2021, followed by the opening of the Sri Lanka High Commission in Wellington early this year.

It is a significant milestone in the growing partnership between our two nations.

I'm delighted to note that our countries have worked closely to deepen and broaden our ties and as a result, the Sri Lanka- New Zealand bilateral relationship has been further consolidated.

I look forward to working closely with New Zealand, to transform our relations into a dynamic, multifaceted partnership in the future.

Minister Peters and I had wide-ranging and productive discussions today, focused mainly on advancing our interests in the areas of trade and investment, agriculture, education, tourism and sports. We welcomed the negotiations held so far, and discussed working towards the establishment of a Trade and Economic Dialogue with New Zealand, through which we hope to streamline collaboration across multiple sectors and promote growth and prosperity for Sri Lanka and New Zealand.

We also explored expanding trade links, especially in high-potential sectors such as dairy, processed food, and fresh produce, and discussed improving market access for Sri Lankan products.

New Zealand's longstanding support for Sri Lanka's dairy industry—including initiatives like the Dairy Excellence Training Initiative (DETI)—has had a transformational impact on rural livelihoods. We agreed to continue and deepen this valuable partnership in the dairy sector.

In the area of tourism, we recognized the untapped potential that exists and agreed to consider joint promotions and investments. We also recognized further measures to boost tourism and people-to-people links.

We acknowledged New Zealand's vital development assistance across multiple sectors—education, social cohesion, food security, and climate resilience. We expressed keen interest in expanding vocational training collaboration, with a focus on industry-aligned skills development for youth.

With over 1,200 Sri Lankan students studying in New Zealand, we reiterated our interest in building stronger educational linkages, and enhancing academic and institutional partnerships.

We commended the cooperation on migration governance, particularly the Migrant Information Centre in Batticaloa, and welcomed continued collaboration on safe and regular migration pathways.

Strengthening institutional integrity is a national priority. We expressed interest in establishing direct cooperation between Sri Lanka's Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) and New Zealand's anti-corruption agencies.

Our discussions recognized the valuable contributions of over 23,000 overseas Sri Lankans in New Zealand, and the positive role they play in strengthening our relationship.

We explored deeper sports collaboration, including training opportunities for young Sri Lankan athletes in cricket and rugby, and programmes for women's empowerment, particularly focused on financial management, entrepreneurship, and diplomacy.

Today's discussions reaffirmed the depth and diversity of the Sri Lanka–New Zealand partnership and we are committed to advancing our cooperation across all spheres.

Sri Lanka values its partnership with New Zealand and will continue to work closely, bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally, to promote shared values, enhance regional cooperation, and foster a peaceful, rules-based international order.

I thank His Excellency the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of New Zealand and his delegation for their constructive engagement and friendship. Sri Lanka looks forward to working closely with New Zealand to further deepen our ties and deliver tangible outcomes for our peoples.

Thank you.