

**Opening Statement by His Excellency Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam,
Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations and
Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council**

Development forum on “Productive employment and decent work”

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

New York, 8 May 2006

Mr. Under-Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to take part in this second Forum on development, organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Allow me first of all to thank the organizers, namely Mr. José Antonio Ocampo and his colleagues, for inviting me and for having chosen as a theme for these two days of meeting “Productive employment and access to decent work”.

This theme will also be addressed by the Economic and Social Council when it holds its high-level segment from 3 to 5 July next, and it has already been discussed at a preparatory meeting last month. In exact terms, the topic is: “Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive

employment and decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development”. In other words, your discussion here is likely to nurture and orient the forthcoming review of the question at the inter-governmental level in the weeks to come. I commend, in this regard, the coherence being demonstrated by different United Nations entities, as is evidenced by the selection of the theme of this forum. Having experts, the civil society and governmental action all focus on the same themes is a goal of the international community to which we contribute greatly at the United Nations in general and in the Economic and Social Council in particular.

At the 2005 World Summit, the heads of State and Government strongly supported fair globalization and resolved to make the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of economic policies. In so doing, they highlighted for action a dimension of the Millennium Goals which has been somewhat neglected, even though it is essential to the halving of poverty rates by 2015. Our discussions this year are therefore of great importance to the honouring of the commitments entered into by the international community.

Economic growth and full employment are interrelated and reinforce each other. It is therefore vital to create an environment that allows us to reach new heights in terms of growth rates, especially through the strengthening of the private sector. Concomitantly, it is imperative to establish the necessary conditions for human capital development and productivity growth. The latter depends on skills enhancement and training for workers and on technology development. In addition, social protection systems must be better devised, and an appropriate balance between labour market flexibility and decent work must be found. In the developing world, it is imperative to improve

working conditions in the informal sector, where jobs are very precarious and are frequently held by women. I would also bring to your attention the situation of many unemployed young people in Africa, the Middle East and other regions of the world who are ready to do virtually anything to survive and may foment social and political tension and instability.

All these issues mean that appropriate national and international policies must be drawn up and implemented. Accordingly, employment must figure prominently in national development and poverty reduction strategies. At the international level, a favourable external environment, covering trade, investment, access to financing, debt relief and international migration management, will help the developing countries to improve their performance. Official development assistance can, moreover, contribute significantly to enhancing human capital and productive capacity in general.

At the Economic and Social Council, we attach great importance to your views on these issues, which should form a basis for the discussions to be held in the Council in early July. I am pleased that the other Vice-Presidents of the Council will preside over the successive roundtables. I am also happy to note the presence of experts of the International Labour Organization and other international organizations with which we worked during the preparatory meetings on 4 and 5 April. It is important to keep up the momentum, which was reached during the preparation of the high-level debates thanks to your support and that of everyone. It only remains for me to wish you every success in your work. I should also inform you that the Economic and Social Council will hold a meeting, which was not originally planned, at 12.00 noon in this room. The meeting of the Forum for this

morning will therefore end at twelve instead of 1.00 pm. Thank you for your attention and understanding.
