

**Speech for Launch of “Janathakshan”
25th October 2013**

Hon. Minister of Economic Development, Basil Rajapaksha, Mr. Udaya Gammanpila,

Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Environment of the Western Province, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today for the launching ceremony of Janathakshan, the legacy organization of Practical Action in Sri Lanka. This is an important occasion for three reasons.

1. Because an European NGO is handing over to a Sri Lankan NGO which should always be our objective and exit strategy. The handing over, the sustainability, continuity;
2. Because Practical Action is a long standing partner of the EU over the last 25 years in Sri Lanka. I pay tribute to Practical Action for their work achieved; and
3. Because the new legacy organization of Practical Action “Janathakshan” will continue to focus on Green and Equitable Development which is a growing sector for EU development cooperation programming in the region.

The EU is happy to see the work carried out by Practical Action and the impact created at the grassroots level. Over the last 25 years the EU has co-financed over 5 million Euros to projects carried out in Sri Lanka through Practical Action. For example, in the sector of Disaster Risk Reduction – we have supported the development of alternative strategies for community-based flood preparedness. In the sector of Urban Development - we have supported the development of integrated approaches to improve urban development plans and worked closely with national and local government to improve slum-dwellers access to infrastructure and services. In addition to this we have also supported projects in sectors such as Transport, Micro Enterprise development and renewable energy. I have no doubt that the outcome of these projects have contributed to improve the quality of life of millions of Sri Lankans.

One of the priorities of the Government of Sri Lanka is to improve community governance in infrastructure. I understand that Practical Action through the “Community Governance in Infrastructure Services Project” co-financed by the EU, has worked closely with the Ministry of Economic Development to improve and strengthen community governance processes and practices in Sri Lanka.

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A hallmark of the intervention philosophy of practical action is strong collaboration and partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka, working together to address matters of common concern to all citizens. This approach reinforces the primary role of governments as the leader to envision; as the enabler to achieve and as the guardian to protect its citizens. The EU encourages strategic partnerships between state and non- state actors working towards a common goal.

The EU has recently commenced implementing a Support to District Development Programme (60 million Euros). The programme focuses on improving the social and economic status of vulnerable communities in post - conflict and poverty affected regions of Sri Lanka as envisaged by the national strategy *Mahinda Chinthanaya*. I would like to take this opportunity to specially thank Minister Rajapaksha and the Ministry of Economic Development for the leadership and support in designing and getting this programme off the ground.

Interventions of Practical action, as the name itself suggests, are carefully thought of, focused, relevant and executed with precision. The legacy of 25 years I am sure would have contributed significantly to better the lives of poor of this country.

The EU is a good friend of Sri Lanka. Despite the difficult economic situation and tight budgetary constraints back home, the EU and its Member States will continue our development assistance to Sri Lanka in the years to come. In the 10 years to 2015, the EU has provided substantial financial aid to Sri Lanka amounting to almost € 700 million. As you may know the EU is also one of the fastest growing export markets to Sri Lanka, fast increasing over the past three years.

You don't need to hear from an Irish man, that Sri Lanka has overcome very difficult challenges. The military conflict is over and great strides have been made in terms of socio- economic development of the people. Success however often brings its own set of challenges. As in many post- conflict societies Sri Lanka is now addressing the many challenges of reconciliation, reconstruction, reintegration of ex-combatants, local economic development on the ground – you know the challenges.

In this context we fully support the government's efforts to take forward the recommendations of the Lessons Learned & Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and the Governments National Action for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights.

EU projects are supporting many action sin these areas.

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As a lower middle income country Sri Lanka is rightly ambitious to continue its socio economic progress. The EU knows and understands many of the challenges your country is currently facing from our own history, including our recent history in certain Member States.

Of course every situation is unique; you cannot photocopy a European solution and apply it directly to Sri Lanka. However, there may be elements of our experience which might be helpful to Sri Lanka as it faces these challenges.

The practical conclusion I would draw is that Sri Lanka and the EU should maintain an open dialogue, even on very difficult issues and even though we may not always agree on everything – which is normal between friends.

This is the spirit in which I would like to work as the EU Ambassador to Sri Lanka.

In this regard we are looking forward to the Sri Lanka – EU Joint Commission meeting this December where top officials from Sri Lanka and the EU will discuss a wide range of issues.

Finally, on one hand, it is sad that Practical Action has decided to phase out from Sri Lanka with all the good work carried out over the last 25 years. However, it is a pleasure to see that “Janathakshan”, a local organization is established to carry on the legacy of Practical Action. I do believe this is an exemplary exit strategy for any international organization.

Let me warmly congratulate the staff and management of Janathakshan on their launch and their decision to carry forward the legacy of Practical Action in Sri Lanka.

Thank you