

## **Foreign Minister's travel**

1. It is evident that as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I will need to travel overseas with a view to obtaining the best outcome for Sri Lanka, economically and politically in a very challenging domestic and international situation.
2. Today much of our progress depends on not only a heavy workload domestically but also pursuing our interests overseas. It is very evident that the global context has changed vastly and Sri Lanka must position itself in order to obtain maximum benefit in the evolving situation.
3. The main global trends affecting Sri Lanka today have international dimensions - economic, political, trade and region related including Indian Ocean.

### With regard to economic;

It is clear that we have to go beyond our traditional trade links with the West. Asia, India, China and ASEAN are seen as the new centers for economic growth. In my travels overseas, we are strengthening our links with these new partners. We have already announced that we need to join RCEP and strengthen our ASEAN links. China already has significant investments in Sri Lanka. We have historical and ongoing links of friendship with India.

### With regard to Middle East;

As Foreign Minister, I have been successful in obtaining significant investment from Saudi, UAE, ..... The Foreign Minister of UAE will be visiting Sri Lanka. We have had Joint Commission discussions with Saudi Arabia. All these successes require personal and official interaction, and exchanges of visits.

### With regard to the IMF negotiations;

As Foreign Minister, I have supported the significant effort by H.E. President in his capacity as Finance Minister. It was as a result of Sri Lanka's excellent outreach with both western and non-western countries that we were able to ensure financial guarantees from the creditors and IMF approval for our EFF in record time. No other developing country has been successful in doing this. In fact, these countries have gone out of their way to support Sri Lanka. The Paris Club created a new international mechanism – The "common platform" led by Japan, France and India. This is the first time ever that happened. China has supported us throughout and is a Paris Club process observer. All this is a result of extensive external connections by Sri Lanka, including myself as Foreign Minister let by H.E. President, all Cabinet colleagues and senior officials. This requires aggressive international travel and participation by Sri Lanka in relevant places. Otherwise we will be left behind.

With regard to political aspects:

Sri Lanka is facing challenges from remnants of LTTE lobby overseas. You have seen the recent outrageous claims of genocide. We need to face these challenges and this requires external interaction. Similarly, at the Human Rights Council, it is my duty as Foreign Minister to be there whenever necessary and to defend the country and to demonstrate the significant effort that Sri Lanka has made to defeat terrorism and restore peace stability and democracy in the country. We also have demonstrated how our democratic traditions and institutions were able to withstand the challenges from last year. For this, I will travel to Geneva as many times as the country requires.

With regard to the region:

Sri Lanka will be taking over the chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in October this year. This organization has 23 member countries and 10 observers. It is a great prestige for Sri Lanka to be chairing this important forum at a time when the whole world is focusing on developments in the Indian Ocean. I have spoken in many international fora highlighting the contribution that Sri Lanka as an important maritime country will make towards peace and cooperation including in sustainable use of the ocean by all the Indian Ocean countries.

With regard to UNGA:

It is clear that all the critical issues Sri Lanka is currently facing such as food security, sustainable development, renewable energy, climate change, cyber security, digitalization, combating transnational organized crime, the global debt situation etc. are being discussed have multilateral dimensions. Sri Lanka has to be at the table in order to make our voice heard and to strengthen our friendships through likeminded countries such as G-77 and NAM.

4. It is abundantly clear that the Foreign Minister must travel in order to bring these political, economic and other benefits to Sri Lanka. The advantages arising from these connections far outweigh the costs and the benefits are not only immediate but also for the future. It is very clear that in view of the economic crisis the Foreign Minister and myself we have taken several steps to minimize expenditure for travel. Only essential travel is recommended and all officials without exception travel on economy. Also, whenever possible meetings are encouraged to be held in Sri Lanka and not in other countries.