

Good morning.

Madam Chair and colleagues,

This is my first meeting of this sort and spent time eagerly observing and learning what's happening during the first two days, and decided to request the floor with the permission of the chair to share Sri Lanka's view representing Central Indian Ocean region.

First let me thank all for their commitments and dedication to beat beach plastics at global level and Sri Lanka always pledge its fullest contribution and support.

We are blessed with a highly bio diverse economically, environmentally and culturally important coastline for 1,620 km and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is about 517,000 sq. km, that is eight times larger than the land mass.

In Sri Lanka, beach and ocean pollution is one of the major environmental hazards we are facing at present. That includes solid and liquid waste.

Since this forum is specifically focused on plastic pollution, I like to share our experiences, lessons learnt, challenges and a little bit of way forward under that topic.

We strongly believe that all our efforts should be focused on stopping the addition of plastics to the ocean, because, if we allow it to happen, if we let plastic to drain to the ocean, the recovery options we are having at our hands become highly restricted. Estimated 3.2 million tons of trash concentrated in the North Pacific Gyre alone. I personally cannot imagine how we recover millions of tons of plastics concentrated on the ocean floor of all five ocean gyres.

Are we going to recover them ? or are we more focused on more doable actions on the ground level ?

Sri Lanka opted and believes in more practical actions aiming tangible results. Aiming that we developed new policies

We developed 'National Action Plan for Marine Environment Protection in Sri Lanka' (Clean Oceans 2030 Vision), with short medium and long term goals

We are implementing Solid Waste Management and Wetland Policy

And we are now in the process of amending Marine Pollution Prevention Act aiming to confront with current beach and ocean pollution issues more effectively.

Sri Lanka banned four polythene products such as High-density polyethylene (HDPE), shopping bags, carry bags, lunch sheets and polystyrene lunch boxes.

We banned the usage of polythene in all decorations, specially the usage of polythene in political, social and cultural events.

Not only that, from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017, we banned the burning of polythene and plastics in open spaces.

On the ground level, we organize beach clean ups in very short intervals. Even yesterday 1000 volunteers cleaned a lagoon near to Colombo.

Sri Lanka declared coastal cleanup week, each year from September 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday. During international Coastal Cleanup (ICC) program Sri Lanka ranked no 9 in 2016 and no 16 in 2017 ranked among top 20 countries by participation.

We're determined to improve more in this year.

From last year, we are establishing wire mesh traps across coastal streams and channel mouths to trap solid waste and arranged local governments to collect them regularly. For that Ministry of Irrigation joined hands with ministry of Environment.

From this year, we selected 60 women from poor coastal families, allocating 1 km each for them, to maintain clean beach stretch of 60 km around the country. For that Coca Cola Sri Lanka has already gave their consent to fund the whole project. (Women empowerment and clean environment)

Sri Lanka is fighting to eradicate Dengue fever and for that we have well organized national programs. We even coupled beach cleaning programs to national dengue eradication program with the support of Ministry of Health.

The other challenge we are facing at the moment is that the amount of ocean debris coming through ocean currents. Especially, on the north, north east and east coast of Sri Lanka. During our waste audit programs, we found at least 5 countries contributing significantly sending us trans boundary waste.

Though we have international agreements to control invasive species spread through ship ballast water, Sri Lanka lacking scientific information on marine invasive species spreading through ocean trash. However, we have observed species such as *Lepas*, *Caulerpa*, *Balanus*, *Crassostrea*, *Saccostrea* and *Perna* species fouling ocean trash.

We became a party to UN Clean seas program, Sri Lanka was nominated as a leading country along with United Kingdom in protecting mangroves at Common wealth heads of Government (CHOGM) meeting held in London, April, 2018.

Sri Lanka actively contributed developing regional marine litter management plan along with other South Asian countries under the collaboration of UN Environment and South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP). This will be launched in few days time at the world environment day celebrations in Mumbai, India.

Further, we reiterate Sri Lanka's support and commitments to other initiatives discussed during last two days.

However,

It's understood that the clock is ticking. We are already late in combating marine plastic problem. Cost of no action is sky rocketing. Environmental benefits are slowly draining.

Trusting on medium and long term solutions about to be finalized in this forum, Sri Lanka highlights the need of the implementation of short term doable actions to combat beach and marine pollution.

Eg. Banning of single use plastics such as straws, micro beads in cosmetics, provision of environmentally friendly alternatives.

Therefore, we are very much looking forward to witness the implementation of such doable short term global actions in very near future.

Finally, you may all know that Sri Lanka ranked no 5 in worst plastic offenders list published in 2015. We humbly inform the whole world that, in reality we are not on the top. We have solid proofs from data collected from the very grassroots level. But taking it as a blessing came in disguise, we work harder and harder to beat plastic pollution at local, regional and global level.

I thank you.