

**Commitment statement by
H.E. Maithripala Sirisena
President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

**Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's
Empowerment:**

A Commitment to Action

27th September 2015, UN Headquarters, New York

Check against delivery.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to participate at this important meeting on gender equality and women's empowerment.

I bring to this forum, the greetings of all the women and girls of Sri Lanka. I also thank 'UN Women' and the President of the People's Republic of China, on their behalf, for co-organizing and co-hosting this event.

I am reminded on this occasion of the famous saying by the Chinese Leader, Mao Zedong, that "**Women hold up half the sky**".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In fact it is not just half the sky that they hold up but more than that. It is a proven and accepted fact that women's empowerment and their contribution are vital for the sustainable progress of all our nations, and the world.

This meeting is timely. The world marks the 20th Anniversary of the "Beijing Platform for Action" this year, and also adopts a new development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

There is no better time than this to re-commit to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka made an early start in this important sector. Universal Adult Franchise was introduced in my country in 1931. Free education for both boys and girls and free health care were introduced very early after Independence. Today, our country is reaping the benefit of these sound policies.

Since the adoption of the "Beijing Platform for Action", further steps were taken to achieve gender equality. This was mainly by introducing reforms to domestic laws and mainstreaming gender related priorities into Government action plans.

Sri Lanka had in fact adopted a Women's Charter two years before the "Beijing Platform for Action." We also have a National Plan of Action on Women, which is currently being updated.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite all these steps taken in my country, there is still a lot more to be done to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

Women make up more than half the population of my country (52%). They make a significant contribution to the national economy and the wellbeing of our society.

However, the long years of conflict in my country has resulted in a large number of Women Headed Households. Making special arrangements for this vulnerable social group is one of my government's priorities.

We also have a dedicated Ministry to deal with matters related to women and children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Government and I take the responsibility of ensuring the promotion and protection of the rights of women in my country very seriously; and we remain firm in our commitment to strive continuously with diligence to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

Thank you.