

**Welcome speech by President of Sri Lanka, H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa
At the Sports Breakfast of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2013
(Water's Edge, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka, 16 November 2013)**

His Royal Highness Prince Tunku Imran, President of the Commonwealth Games Federation,

Secretary General of the Commonwealth
Members of the Commonwealth Games Federation,
Representatives of International bodies,
Sportsmen and Sportswomen,
Friends,

I warmly welcome you to the CHOGM sports breakfast. It is indeed a great pleasure to host this prestigious event in collaboration with the Commonwealth Games Federation. As a sports loving Commonwealth nation, we are proud to showcase our achievements in this arena.

Sports is an important aspect of the Commonwealth with resonance for all its member states, symbolizing unity, friendship, brotherhood and team spirit. Success in the field of sports brings dignity, pride and self respect. The benefit of sports is universal and its positive impact is invaluable in building the character of young people.

In Sri Lanka, sports have played a unique role in the country's resurgence, following a near three-decade struggle against brutal terrorism. As a dividend of peace and prosperity, the country has absorbed the values of fitness, fair play, teamwork and the pursuit of excellence in the arena of sports. These values have carved a successful path for reconciliation and building communal harmony. Sports have undoubtedly helped to build bridges and create social integration and amity among different communities.

When our Government undertook the task of rebuilding Sri Lanka in 2005, we developed a strategy based on global learning – but adapted, to benefit our people. “Mahinda Chinthana”, the main policy agenda of our Government, presents a comprehensive programme, where the nation as a whole, is being developed, under a common banner. Every province, district, and division has been included within a blue print to provide state-of-the-art sports facilities, including stadiums, playgrounds and training institutions.

Excellent sports complexes have been built at Kilinochchi in the Northern Province and Nawalapitiya in the Central Province, in addition to a new international cricket stadium in Hambantota, and an international rugby ground in Colombo. For the first time in Sri Lanka, steps are being taken to make our nation a sporting

Traditionally, we in this country have proudly engaged in many indigenous sports. In the main National cultural festivals like the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, sporting activities play a key role in the shared celebrations.

In contemporary Sri Lanka, sports have evolved into a very important and pivotal part of society. Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was then known, participated in the Empire Games in 1938, the predecessor to the Commonwealth Games, and one of our citizens, A. Henricus won a Gold medal in Boxing. In 1952, another Sri Lankan, Duncan White created history in the country by winning a Silver medal at the Olympics, participating in Hurdles. More recently, in 2000, our very own sprint queen Susanthika Jayasinghe once again brought the coveted Silver medal to our homeland, by her victory at the Olympics, 200 meters. Over the last 75 years, many Sri Lankan sportsmen and sportswomen have excelled in sports. At the international level, and continue to bring glory to our motherland.

One of the most cherished legacies of our colonial history that we share with many Commonwealth member countries is the game of cricket. As a leading cricketing nation, that won the World Cup in 1996, we participate in all competitive international sporting activities. The Government of Sri Lanka, through the Ministry of Sports has in recent years, focused on developing “Sports for All”, a concept, which looks at involving people from all strata of our society and promoting their participation to ensure their holistic development. This is now a part of the curriculum in our school education and has become a priority among the sports loving youth.

In keeping with the Commonwealth values, creating equality and social integration through sports has been the underlying theme in our country's sporting agenda. We have created new opportunities for the differently abled. Through sports, we have created a new passion in our people, whose lives are being transformed with a holistic development.

Friends,

Sri Lanka is a land brimming with great promise. We are very touched that you have taken the time to visit us, which enables you to interact and understand who we are, and what our nation represents. We have a very rich history to protect and we are ready for a great leap forward, through which we will transform our nation to be a smart nation, with smart people. We have already begun that process. We have given a reason, created the space and opportunity. For those who carried guns, now to carry the national flag. In addition, cheer for victory as One Nation. One People. One Sri Lanka.

We invite you, to be a well-wisher and a stakeholder, in our march forward and the story of resurgence.

Thank you.