

On the invitation of the World Health Organization (WHO), President Maithripala Sirisena visited India from 6th to 7th November 2016 to deliver the key note address at the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on 7th November 2016.

Addressing a large gathering of Ministers of Health, Officials of the World Health Organization and related International Organizations as well as other senior officials in the health sector from around 180 member countries of the FCTC, the President said that tobacco and alcohol control have been placed at the top of the Sri Lanka's national agenda since he assumed the Office of the President in early 2015. He said that Sri Lanka completed the Global Youth Tobacco Survey earlier this year and it indicated that the use of tobacco and smoking among the youth has shown a significant downward trend since the last survey. The WHO STEPS survey that was recently concluded highlighted that the prevalence of smoking among adults has also slowed down significantly. He further elaborated on the work of the Presidential Task Force, which serves to monitor the situation with regard to drugs and narcotics, where he holds monthly review meetings to assess the progress of the work.

Recalling the address of Dr Margaret Chan, Director General of the WHO at the COP 6 of the FCTC, emphasizing the need to resist the attempts of the tobacco industry to undermine tobacco control through litigation and interference in government policy-making, President Sirisena shared his experience of a long legal battle with the tobacco industry while he was the Minister of Health when he tried to bring in legislation to include pictorial health warnings covering 75% on cigarette packets. He also stated that after his assumption of office as President, the Minister of Health introduced a new Act of Parliament to increase the pictorial warnings to cover 80% of the surface.

The President of the Conference of the Parties, Mr. Oleg Salagay said that the President Sirisena has been invited as the guest speaker to address the gathering as a token of appreciation for his commitment and leadership in the implementation of the policies of the FCTC. WHO recognized that Sri Lanka has taken stringent measures under the guidance of President Sirisena to significantly advance the devastating effects of the use of tobacco. The recent accession of Sri Lanka to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade of Tobacco Products signifies another landmark decision by the government in curtailing all forms of illicit trade in tobacco products and to show the way forward in the battle against tobacco throughout South Asia.

President Sirisena also called on President Pranab Mukherjee during his stay in New Delhi and discussed issues of bilateral interests. The President invited the Indian President to visit Sri Lanka. President Mukherjee accepted the invitation and the dates of the visit would be worked out at a mutually convenient time.

The President also visited the New Delhi Centre of the Maha Bodhi Society of India and attended a religious ceremony conducted by the Bikkhu in Charge Venerable R. Sumiththananda Thero. He also paid respects to the Sacred Kapilavastu Relics at the National Museum in New Delhi.

The President was accompanied by the Minister of Health, Dr. Rajitha Senaratne, Minister of Provincial Councils and Local Governments Faiszer Musthapha, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to India Chitranganee Wagiswara, and other senior officials of the Ministry of Health and the High Commission of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka High Commission in New Delhi

8th November 2016.