

High Commissioner Prasad Kariyawasam led the Sri Lanka delegation to the First Ministerial Conference of the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES) in New Delhi on 21 June 2012. RIMES is a collective response of Asian and African nations arising out of the unprecedented trauma of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and consists of member and collaborative countries. Representatives of Afghanistan, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan Cambodia, Comoros, India, Kenya, Laos, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, attended the Conference. India as the present Chair of the RIMES Council convened the First Ministerial Meeting with a view to building RIMES institutional and core operational activities.

Minister of Earth Sciences India Vilas Rao Deshmukh Chaired the Ministerial Meeting while Minister of State for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences of India Dr. Ashwani Kumar, Ministers from Bangladesh and Maldives were among the Ministers who participated and Mr. S H Kariyawasam, Director General of the Department of Meteorology of Sri Lanka also attended the meeting.

Speaking at the Meeting, High Commissioner Kariyawasam stated that following the 2004 Tsunami, Sri Lanka has worked closely with its neighbours, the international community to build capacities and to manage such disasters and mitigate their consequences. As a result of the commitment of the government and support of Sri Lanka's partner countries and institutions, in Sri Lanka there is now capacity with government and awareness among vulnerable communities as to how to respond to such Tsunami situations.

Referring to other geologic and hydro-meteorological hazards that are more frequent and create havoc in civilian life in Sri Lanka such as floods, droughts, lightening and storm surges, High Commissioner Kariyawasam said that Sri Lanka is encouraged that the RIMES activities would encompass such disasters as well enabling member countries to prepare and to respond adequately for saving life and property.

The full text of the High Commissioner's statement:

**Statement by High Commissioner Prasad Kariyawasam, Leader of Sri Lanka delegation at the First Ministers' Conference of the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning**

**System for Africa and Asia (RIMES)**

Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka is happy to participate at the First Ministerial Conference of the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES). We wish to thank the Government of India for hosting this important meeting and for the excellent arrangements made in this connection.

The Cabinet Minister In-charge of Disaster Management of Sri Lanka, Hon Mahinda Amaraweera could not attend this meeting since he is at present attending the Rio+20 Conference in Brazil. He sends his greetings and support for this meeting.

Sri Lanka attaches great importance to the objectives of this Conference, which is indeed a collective response arising out of the unprecedented trauma of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. As one of the countries worst affected by this natural calamity, Sri Lanka has worked closely with our neighbours, the international community and the UN agencies to build capacities and to manage such disasters and mitigate their consequences. As a result of the commitment of the government and support of our partner countries and institution, in Sri Lanka there is now capacity with the government and awareness among vulnerable communities as to how to respond to such Tsunami situations.

Sri Lanka believes that international cooperation is the only way forward for receiving early warnings on natural disasters and mitigating their effects. It is a matter of satisfaction that RIMES has brought together Africa and Asia, two regions that appear more vulnerable to natural disasters. By working closely, our two regions would be able to save lives and property and ensure sustainable development of our regions.

It is in this light that Sri Lanka signed the RIMES International Cooperation Agreement recently. Sri Lanka remains committed to contribute to the RIMES and work closely with RIMES member countries to achieve the objectives of the Master Plan under the RIMES Agreement. We are encouraged by the spirit of support for each other embodied in RIMES regime.

While massive disasters of the nature of Tsunami 2004 are very infrequent in South Asian region, other geologic and hydro-meteorological disasters are more frequent. Therefore, we are encouraged that the RIMES regime will encompass all such disasters as well to assist Member countries to prepare and respond adequately with a view to saving life and property and for rehabilitation. In Sri Lanka, for instance, floods, droughts and lightening and even high winds and storm surges create havoc in civilian life more frequently. Floods remain as the most frequent and last year North Eastern parts of the country experienced high intensity flooding. Almost every year some part of our country is affected by floods and landslides which consume most of our relief service funds. Moreover, lightening causes high number of deaths in Sri Lanka every year in addition to damage it causes to valuable equipments and infrastructure. Drought and high winds that cause damage to property is a major concern as well. In this context, Sri Lanka needs to improve its capacity in numerical weather forecasting and location specified forecasting as well. Seasonal climate change forecasting and scenario development is yet another need. We need to improve our capacity in lightening detection and allied protection activities as well. It is our expectation that the RIMES regime will be able to assist in these issues as well in time to come to enhance our technical and resource capacities.

In this context, among other initiatives we look forward to RIMES continued support for the Disaster Early Warning System in Sri Lanka. And, Sri Lanka looks forward to become project beneficiary of the Master Plan of RIMES.

In conclusion, we thank Hon Ministers of India and Mr Sailesh Nayak, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences for their presence and encouragement for the work of RIMES. In fact in our view, leadership, resource and expertise mobilization by India and other major donor institutions and countries will be singularly important for the success of RIMES regime.

Thank you.