

**SPEECH OF HON.ANIL JAYANTHA FERNANADO, MINISTER OF
LABOUR OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI
LANKA AT THE ASPAG Ministerial Meeting**

11th June 2025

Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this important gathering, and I extend my sincere thanks to the Government of Japan for hosting the Asia-Pacific Group (ASPAG) Ministerial Meeting.

At the same time I warmly congratulate Bangladesh the incoming coordinator and I assure that Sri Lanka will provide our fullest support and cooperation during your tenure.

ASPAG plays a critical role in enabling us, as regional partners, to collaborate and contribute towards the objectives of ILO. We have observed the ASPAG's strong capacity for cooperation and its commitment to identifying new avenues for meaningful collaboration.

Sri Lanka is taking renewed steps to align its labour and economic development strategies with the overarching goal of promoting equality and advancing social justice for all workers.

We have prioritized comprehensive labour market reforms. We are currently reviewing outdated labour legislation to establish a more coherent, simplified legal framework. This reform agenda is designed to support productivity growth while ensuring that workers receive a fair share of the benefits. It also aims to improve compliance, foster decent working conditions, promote access to information, and make the labour market more inclusive and responsive to the evolving needs of both workers and employers.

We are working to expand our social protection system. With technical assistance from the ILO Colombo Office, we are transitioning from only an employer responsible model to a broader, insurance-based system. We are exploring the introduction of unemployment insurance, maternity benefits, and employment injury coverage. We believe this transformation will help reduce gender-based discrimination in hiring and promote greater women labour force participation.

We are taking preparatory legal steps towards the ratification of **ILO Convention C 190** on violence and harassment in the world of work. Our objective is to ensure

that national laws provide strong and effective protection for all workers, particularly those in vulnerable, informal, and unrecognized sectors.

In line with the ILO's call to reinforce the *jobs-rights-growth* nexus, Sri Lanka is also investing in digital solutions to enhance labour inspection, complaints management, and social security systems. These efforts aim to strengthen institutional capacity and improve our engagement with workers to provide decent work opportunities in a rapidly changing labour market.

Sri Lanka firmly believes that child labour has no place in the modern society. It cannot be justified under any circumstances. Strong legislation, effective policy frameworks, and a responsive institutional mechanism are essential to addressing this pervasive issue.

Finally, I wish to emphasize Sri Lanka's strong commitment to working more closely and transparently with our ASPAG partners. We are prepared to face emerging challenges—whatever their form—through cooperation and solidarity, with the ultimate aim of securing social justice for all in the world of work.

Thank you.