

**Speech made by His Excellency Mr. Somasundaram Skandakumar at the
presentation of credentials to His Excellency Lt Gen Rt Hon Sir Jerry Mateparae,
Governor General of New Zealand**

Your Excellency, I have the honour to present to you the Letter of Credence which His Excellency, Maithripala Sirisena the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka has addressed to Your Excellency, accrediting me as High Commissioner to New Zealand.

I also have the honour to present the Letter of Recall of my predecessor.

Your Excellency, Sri Lanka and New Zealand enjoy a longstanding friendship underpinned by shared values as members of the United Nations and the Commonwealth. The friendly ties that bind our countries together have expanded in multi-faceted areas of cooperation, notably trade, sports and education.

In January 2015, the people of Sri Lanka brought about change in the country's political leadership by electing His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena as President and voting in a government of national unity later in the year. The new leadership changed the political culture through a commitment to democratic values and the rule of law. Meaningful steps have also been taken to facilitate national reconciliation and to bring prosperity to all our people.

As part of those initiatives, a Declaration of Peace was read out in all three languages at the National Day on the 4th of February 2015 where respect was also paid to citizens of all ethnicities and religions who lost their lives in the tragic conflict that afflicted the country for over three decades and to all victims of violence since Independence.

The 19th Amendment to the Constitution, was passed in Parliament on 28th of April last year, to ensure the independence of key public institutions. This amendment also introduced for the first time into the Constitution, national reconciliation as part of the President's role in depicting him as 'the symbol of national unity'.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has outlined his economic outlook in Parliament emphasising the need for multi-disciplined economic strength; local competitiveness, international trade and investments to bring about economic prosperity. The Government's goal is to foster a "knowledge based Social Market Economy built on social justice principles".

Your Excellency, New Zealand is an important trading partner for Sri Lanka although at present the balance of trade is largely in favour of New Zealand. I hope to focus on rectifying this towards a more balanced trade relationship and expanding the economic cooperation between our two countries.

We were delighted that the Asia New Zealand Foundation chose Sri Lanka as a venue for their Leadership Network Offshore Forum in December last year, enabling young professionals of your country to engage with businesses and young entrepreneurs in ours. The outcome leaves us confident that Sri Lanka will remain in the Foundation's focus in the future as well.

The sizeable Sri Lankan community of over 12,000, who have made New Zealand their home, and contribute constructively to the social, cultural and economic development of their adopted homeland, continues to be a source of pride to us.

Our two countries also share a love for cricket, and enjoy growing sporting links in rugby as well. These cordial people to people links have been further strengthened through cultural connections, and the gift of an elephant to the Auckland Zoo by the President of Sri Lanka is a reflection of our strong friendship.

Excellency,

As I take up my new appointment, I will endeavour to explore new avenues of cooperation between our two countries to further strengthen our excellent relations. I am confident I have the good will and cooperation of the Government of New Zealand towards fulfilling this task.

I take this opportunity to convey to Your Excellency and the Government, and People of New Zealand, the greetings of the President, and the People of Sri Lanka.

I now have the honour to present to Your Excellency the Letter of Recall of my Predecessor and my own Letter of Credence.