

National Statement of Commitment for Transformation of Education System

We, recalling our greater acceptance of education as a human right with the free education policy introduced in 1947, which made a complete transformation of the education system emanated from Buddhist Pirivenas and missionary school systems in the pre-colonial and colonial eras; and

Progressive policies and infrastructure development such as compulsory primary education, grade 5 scholarship, central colleges system, teacher recruitment, and teacher education institutions (National Colleges of Education, NIE, etc.), in fact, achieved a higher literacy rate (92.6%), high enrolment rate in primary (98%) and secondary education (98.62%), and a significant retention rate (88.66%) among mid and higher income countries; and our success in gender parities in access to education and a higher completion rate in lower secondary education under Education for All goals;

Acknowledging the need for improvements in early childhood education aligning with the new National ECCD policy, tertiary and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) education, facilities to study natural sciences for more students, access for children with special education needs (1.7% of total children), and public-private partnership in education;

Reaffirming a greater transformation of the education system through a comprehensive education reform process initiated in 2019 aligning with the 2030 education agenda and the general education sector development plan from 2020 to 2025 which expects a coherent paradigm shift across the curriculum, pedagogy, materials, assessment and accountability in education administration to introduce a result and outcome-oriented education system;

Well recognising the urgent need for attention to the Sri Lankan education system severely affected by the COVID 19 pandemic as well as the current economic crisis;

Underscoring the fact that the country has a lot of residual and basic strengths due to its good HDIs and **firmly believing** that the leverage of human capital through education would be the most effective and sustainable solution to recover from the present severe economic crisis;

Reaffirm our commitment toward an effective learning recovery and transforming education according to the Bangkok Statement 2022 as follows;

- a) **We commit** to continue operating all schools, universities, and vocational and technical training centers with specific attention to the recovery of learning loss with equity through a blended learning approach following the present success of complete control of the COVID 19 pandemic nevertheless, unprecedented disruptions of the economic crisis have led to a temporarily limited opening of schools.
- b) **We commit** to full implementation of the Contingency Emergency Response Plan (CERP) in response to the impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic with the required modification to the consequences of the current economic crisis based on new recovery timelines to minimize the impact on the continued students' education.
- c) **We commit** to ensuring the physical and mental well-being of students and education staff affected by the COVID 19 Pandemic. While we assure equal and equitable access and inclusive participation through existing subsidiary programs such as free textbooks, uniforms, and subsidized travel facilities through public-private partnerships, more investments will commit to health and hygiene infrastructure, mental health programs, student safety, and health insurance, decreasing malnutrition among school children.
- d) **We commit** to removing disparities in the access and delivery of digitalized education by improving required infrastructure with public-private partnerships and providing

government subsidiary programs for economically disadvantaged students to own digital devices such as smartphones, laptops, and internet facilities at home.

- e) **We commit** special attention to early childhood education which immensely impacts children's early literacy and numeracy skills and provides necessary guidance and arrangements to reopen ECCD centers with all required safety measures and hygiene practices to minimize the impact of the pandemic and the economic crisis on the Early Child Care and Development sector.
- f) **We commit** to advancing the current initiatives of formulating national education policy and updating all education laws and regulations with the purpose of strengthening policy and legal framework to address all forms of exclusion, disparity, and inequality in access to education and learning, participation, and ensuring quality education.
- g) **We commit** to ensuring sector-wide professionalisation of teaching and improvement of teachers' well-being with the firm belief that motivated, empowered, and effective teachers are the key to recovering and transforming education and its system and quality of learning for better learning outcomes.
- h) **We commit** to continue and further improve existing teacher recruitment and deployment, and continuous training mechanisms by upgrading teacher training colleges to degree awarding universities, and updating training modules focussing on transformative education which comprises inclusive approaches, life skills for the 21st Century, global citizenship, peace and sustainable development, health, safety and sexual education and environmental sustainability and promoting meaningful involvement of parents, teachers, and community in the teaching process, with the wholistic approach of improving content knowledge, pedagogy, teaching capacity, and assessment methods focussed on learner-centered education, and the use of new technologies.
- i) **We commit** to ensuring the quality of education with emphasis given to teaching Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) in a wholistic and integrated approach to impart skills such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, emotional skills, empathy, knowledge of peace in school curricula and skills for work through curricula of TVET with a greater understanding of synergies between social development and economic growth.
- j) **We commit** to the digital transformation of education as the heart of 21st Century education in Sri Lanka with the expectation of making learners prepared to accommodate fast-evolving technologies, skills, and knowledge healthy and safe manner in their professional and personal lives. We also commit to introducing blended learning methods with improved infrastructure facilities of safe digital platforms and apparatus, e-learning management systems, and smart-class rooms to all schools, vocational and technical training centers, and universities while establishing digital education centers in remote areas.
- k) **We commit** to mapping out what our existing talents and areas need to invest in reskilling along with the digital transformations in education for acquiring fast-emerging changes to the core skills required for jobs in the 21st century. It would also ensure introducing new curricula comprising areas such as the internet of things (IoT) and big data, web development, social media marketing, and software engineering for continuous integration will lead to areas such as data analytics, data sciences, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain management, logistics, cloud computing, compliance together with digital safety and well-being all of which have fuelled the modern Industrial Revolution.

- l) **We commit** to ensuring the inclusion of children with special needs (currently 28.27% are excluded) in the education system from their early childhood development through identifying, categorizing, treating and training with specified centres, staff, technology and toolkits.
- m) **We commit** to introducing a sector-based, result-oriented, and data-driven efficient allocation methodology in financing education to ensure all sectors which include ECCD, primary, secondary, and tertiary education, TVET, continuous teacher training and development, and curricular development to ensure allocation efficiency for improved internal efficacy even under the present economic crisis. We highly acknowledge the importance of strengthening ongoing EMIS and other data management systems to facilitate such a methodology and overall decision-making process.

We have also recognized the urgency of investing in some sectors of education through public-private co-partnerships, especially in the areas of TVET, digital education, and higher education. We encourage the private sector to contribute to the sustainability of education as a long-term investment for the skilled labor force.

We acknowledge the immense contribution of international partners and UN agencies to improving infrastructures, technical capacities, and quality standards through various forms of assistance such as loans, donations, training, and scholarships. Recalling the Sustainable Development Goals, Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and Paris Principles on Climate Change, **we appreciate** the continued cooperation of international partners and agencies willing to support the transformation of education and its system in Sri Lanka.