On behalf of the ILO, I would like to welcome you all to this national consultation organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour for development of a national OSH Programme. A topic we do indeed see very much eye to eye on.

Preventing work-related accidents and diseases and protecting workers from work-related safety and health hazards have been and
are an increasingly important challenge for Sri Lanka. Existing OSH legal frameworks are not strong enough to protect all workers as the legislative FW does not cover all work places. Labour inspectors and OSH engineers need to upgrade their capacities to tackle new emerging OSH issues in the country including in the informal economy. The lack of OSH coverage for the majority of workers in micro and small enterprises and the informal economy is a cause for concern. It is absolutely critical that we safeguard those who are most vulnerable in the world of work. We need to look at the safety and health of workers in the micro and small enterprises, informal economy and rural and agricultural sector, including the plantation sector, many of whom are women.

So, where does the solution lie? As always a forward looking and a multi-pronged approach is necessary. It is important to strengthen National OSH systems including legislation, inspection systems, occupational accident and disease reporting systems, awareness and training of workers and employers. Sri Lanka has taken most of the necessary steps for promoting occupational safety & health. A National OSH Profile has been compiled and published in 2013. In 2014, National Safety and Health Policy has been adopted. Currently Sri Lanka is in the process of finalizing a new OSH Act which would provide protection for all workers and occupations.
Hence, the development of National Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Programme could not be more timely. A National OSH Programme would promote the development of a national preventative safety and health culture, eliminate or minimize work-related hazards and risks and have a national system in place with objectives, targets and indicators of progress within a predetermined time frame along with indicators for assessing progress. Accountabilities will be spelt out and straightforward.

As we move ahead, we need to be cognizant of the fact that the world of work is undergoing a rapid and fundamental change. Technology is transforming the nature of work pushing organizations to redesign most jobs while also having to revisit the conventional concept of work. Different forms of work arrangements are emerging as people prefer to work from home, part time work and in the platform economy. Nature of work and so called “workplaces” of the future will differ substantially.

These will certainly have implications for organizations, implications for workers and implications for public policy and we need to align and manage the expectations across constituencies in addressing these emerging issues. In light of these issues I urge you to think strategically about how to manage the health and safety issues that will arise as a result of these trends over the coming years.
I hope that this forum will provide an opportunity for tripartite participants to analyse and discuss the current OSH situation in Sri Lanka and identify priority areas for national action on OSH which we hope will be a solid basis for drafting and adopting the National OSH Programme.

I am pleased to see that the forum has brought together our tripartite constituents and professionals from the field of occupational safety and health and hope this workshop will give you an opportunity to renew your commitments to improve OSH in Sri Lanka, and also to expedite the process of presenting the OSH Act to Parliament for ratification.

We also hope that within this centenary year of the ILO, Sri Lanka will also work towards ratifying convention 155, which Sri Lanka pledged to ratify when ILO celebrated its 90th Anniversary.

As always, the ILO is ready to work together with our tripartite constituents and beyond to develop, finalize and effectively implement the national OSH programme for promoting OSH and realizing Decent Work for all.

I wish you all a very productive workshop.