Speech at the launch of Nutrition Month 2013

Mr. Ezatullah Majeed
Chief of Health
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Honorable Minister of Health
District Secretary Polonnaruwa
Secretary of Health
Regional Director of Health Services of Polonnaruwa
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Students

It is a great pleasure for me to speak to you today on behalf of all development partners supporting nutrition in Sri Lanka.

Let me begin, Honorable Minister, by congratulating your Ministry on organizing this month once again, and drawing attention to the importance of nutrition for a healthy and indeed prosperous nation.

All development partners agree that nutrition is the foundation for sustainable development. And, indeed, we are delighted that the discourse around nutrition has changed to a more multi-sectoral one – and is no longer just about food.

We certainly hope that this month brings an understanding across the island about the factors that enable good nutrition and, conversely, the factors that also cause under-nutrition, which include insufficient protein-energy intake; poor health; inadequate child care and feeding practices, unsafe water and unhygienic conditions.

Under-nutrition is linked to child death, illness and poor development. Stunted children are inches shorter than they could have been with proper nutrition. They have weaker immune systems that make them more vulnerable to disease. And they learn slower at school. Indeed, some studies have shown that stunting slows brain development and results in the loss of two to three years of learning. And then, when stunted children enter the workforce, their diminished physical and cognitive development may reduce their earning capacity by as much as 22% - which, in turn, affects national development.

Fortunately, evidence tells us that focusing on the nutrition of pregnant mothers and babies under the age of two is critical, because in these critical 1000 days, as we call them, the foundation can be laid for a healthy life.

Honorable Minister, all of Sri Lanka’s development partners, UNICEF included, are committed to supporting the Government and people of Sri Lanka to scale up and sustain nutrition interventions that focus on the 1000 days, as well as those that adopt multi-sectoral community based approaches. We also remain committed to providing innovative ideas and technical expertise so that together we can build “A Healthy Nation through Proper Nutrition.” Thank you