

# UNICEF at 70: 'With committed and concerted effort, we can achieve more for our children today, and build a better Sri Lanka for tomorrow'



Today, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016, the United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF) celebrates our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. For over seven decades UNICEF has worked tirelessly to build a better world for every child. In that time, working with many of the most visionary and committed governments, partners and businesses, along with countless courageous and dedicated citizens, we have made immense progress for children. Sri Lanka is shining example. In the 50 years UNICEF has been present here, this country has achieved some truly remarkable milestones for children.

Together, we have achieved universal vaccination in Sri Lanka, removing the spectre of many life-threatening and debilitating childhood diseases, forever. Together, we have given lifesaving help and assistance to hundreds of thousands of children and their families affected by natural disasters such as the 2004 Tsunami and the conflict, enabling children to go to school, access healthcare and rebuild their lives. Together we have spoken out on behalf of all children irrespective of gender, religion or ethnicity, influencing policy and helping to develop new ways to protect children. For these, we should all be rightly proud. Sri Lanka has achieved great things for its children. Yet whilst these and many more milestones have been achieved, real challenges remain for children in Sri Lanka, that we must tackle head-on together if we are to achieve Sri Lanka's goals for development and growth.

Violence, abuse and exploitation of children remains a substantial problem for Sri Lanka, mentally and physically scarring children and stunting their cognitive and physical development for life. Unless we act now, this will have serious consequences for Sri Lanka as a whole. There are still far too many children born into and living in poverty, especially in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the Tea Estates and urban areas. This poverty is robbing children of opportunities, and resulting in health and education deprivations that can last generations. We must address poverty and ensure that all children have an equitable chance to succeed. Undernutrition, especially among pregnant women and children under 5 is still too high, with dire consequences for the long term growth and cognitive brain development of the next generation of Sri Lankans. It is vital that together we ensure good nutrition for children, especially during the first 1000 days of life, if we are to secure the future of this nation.

If Sri Lanka is going to achieve its ambitious development goals we must act now, before this unique opportunity is lost. 70 years of experience have shown UNICEF that with committed and concerted efforts focused on our children, our future - together we can achieve real, transformative results.

And so, on our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we call on Sri Lankans to reaffirm your commitment to children, and work with UNICEF and others to help to build a Sri Lanka where every child has the opportunity to survive, where every child has the opportunity to thrive and where every child has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Because a Sri Lanka that invests in and for its children first, is a Sri Lanka that will achieve its goals.

Tim Sutton, Representative, UNICEF Sri Lanka