

Inaugural Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Inauguration of the LKI Foreign Policy Forum

9 August 2023

Hon. State Minister of Foreign Affairs

Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

As the Chairman of the Board of Management of the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute I am delighted to be present here today to inaugurate the flagship '**LKI Foreign Policy Forum**'. The LKI Foreign Policy Forum is one of the five new flagship projects, as explained by our Executive Director, that LKI will be hosting as part of its activities in future. These programmes were introduced following the recent restructuring of LKI research and other activities.

We all know that during the last 3-4 years Sri Lanka went through a very difficult situation; 2019 following the Easter Sunday attack, in 2020-2021 the Covid pandemic, and in 2022 the ultimate effect of the economic upheaval we all saw. So we have two choices; one is we continue the blame game, expect divine intervention and look up and wait, or the other one, you give your best shot with what is available with you. You don't desert your country and get out on the first available opportunity. You continue to fight for your country. I thought we have decided on the second one. So I am grateful to so many of the bright thinking people who had supported and been a part of this courageous journey for Sri Lanka. Last year when I went around the world, more or less unfortunately, I must say and accept, with a begging bowl. It was not very pleasant. It was a story which is sometimes emotionally taxing. From our friends and well-wishers all over the world, I realised that the amount of goodwill Sri Lanka had cultivated over a period of time is enormous. No one wanted Sri Lanka to fail, everyone wanted to help. East and west, neighbours far and closer, everyone wanted Sri Lanka to put a fight and come up. And I am grateful that compared to where we were, nobody is saying we are out of the woods, but compared to what we were last year, we have made a great impact and a comeback. Last year's story was about how Sri Lanka could have collapsed like that; so a story of sadness and a story of reflection. But this year is different, how Sri Lanka had managed to pull itself up. Everywhere we go, that's the question, that's the discussion.

So therefore I make this an opportunity, because no one had fought for Sri Lanka just like that, like our Former Foreign Minister Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar. It is befitting that, on a day when we commemorate him, when we remember him, we work with the same diligence, same enthusiasm, same dedication, and I hope we won't pay the ultimate price also, but the kind of dedication to get ourselves back on track.

Today's launch coincides with the commemoration of the 18th Death Anniversary of the late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar, who was brutally assassinated by the LTTE on 12 August 2005.

The Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute is named in honor of late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar who served as the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka from 1994 to 2001, and again from April 2004 until his assassination. A renowned lawyer by profession, an international civil servant, a humanitarian advocating for human rights, and an exceptional orator, the late Minister compelled the Western world to take terrorism in Sri Lanka seriously in an era that preceded the 9/11 terrorist attack in the USA. Lakshman Kadirgamar marked his presence in the international arena and came to be regarded to be one of the most respected political leaders in Sri Lanka in recent times. He was a celebrated figure, not only for his dedication and service for the peace, security and the betterment of the country, but also for his brilliance, principled stands and leadership.

The remarkable vision of the late Hon. Kadirgamar to establish a think tank to cater to the foreign policy needs of Sri Lanka initiated in 2000, was brought to fruition with the establishment of the Sri Lanka Institute of Strategic Studies. Following his assassination, it was re-named as the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies. It was to grow as an institute to fulfill the country's need for a foreign policy related think tank, by promoting Sri Lanka's intellectual profile in the field of foreign policy and international relations research and engagement. In establishing the LKI, it was envisioned that it would accommodate the purpose of producing contemporary policy relevant research pertinent to policymaking and governance which would support the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, drawing on the expertise of all those of relevance to Sri Lanka foreign policy, both within this country and abroad.

Therefore, I wish to commend LKI for taking this ambitious initiative to commence a series of flagship programmes, one of which is this 'LKI Foreign Policy Forum'. I believe this Policy

Forum would be a pivotal stride towards addressing prevailing global dynamics, combatting challenges, and embracing promising opportunities in both domestic and global platforms, whilst enlightening and assisting the relevant stakeholders involved in the Foreign Policy community. As the Executive Director explained the ‘LKI Foreign Policy Forum’ is envisaged, to provide a platform for discussion, analysis and evaluation which will strengthen the engagement with the foreign policy relevant community. Therefore, it is important that the topics chosen for the discussions are contemporary and relevant and the ensuing discussions provides guidance and recommendations for policy decisions in that regard.

On this momentous occasion, I am delighted to see most of the former Executive Directors in attendance, and greatly appreciate their respective contributions to the upliftment of this institution and their continued engagement with the LKI.

I for one, always believe research, decisions based on data is very very important. If we have had that kind of a practice, particularly in economics, we would have averted the kind of crisis which we saw last year. I was recently in both Thailand and Indonesia, we were having a discussion with them about their countries’ governance style, and sometimes, it’s open everybody knows, they were governed by military rule. But their economy continued to grow. One thing was assured when I had the discussion with them. Despite that situation, they allowed both their fiscal policies and the foreign policy to be run by technocrats. Either the experts in the economy or experts in foreign policy. So, there are many lessons for all of us to learn and it is important we continue to study research, present papers, debate this both openly and within closed doors, in order to gain that right decision for the country.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the newly appointed Executive Director and his energetic team for reassessing the LKI Research Programme to meet the current demands. In addition to the LKI’s present programmes on Global Governance and Global Economy, LKI will be also extending the scope of its research to also include Global Peace & Security and Global Relations. LKI will additionally draw together the relevant experts from the diplomatic, academic, business, civil society, arts and culture and media communities, to build a comprehensive network that could contribute to achieving the specific objectives identified for operationalization.

I take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Suganthie Kadirgamar who is not here today, for her

dedication and sincere services to the Board of Management. Mrs. Kadirgamar is the most senior Board Member having been appointed to the first Board of Management in 2006. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the other Members of the current Board of Management, Mr. Rajan Asirwatham, Mr. Thusantha Wijemanna and Mr. Malinda Seneviratne, who despite their busy schedules are very much involved in the decision-making processes, understanding the limitations within which we are compelled to function. Most importantly they all share the common interest to ensure that the legacy of the Late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar lives through the Institute. The LKI Board is committed to making the necessary investment in financial and human resources to help realize these new initiatives being undertaken.

I believe that through these series of LKI flagship projects and other activities embarked upon, we are truly honouring the vision of the Late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar, who always made his decisions subject to extensive consultation and fact-based research. If my recollection serves me right, at my maiden address to the LKI Staff as the Chairman, I mentioned the importance of this aspect, and noted that if the LKI is to remain relevant it is important for LKI to assist not only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the Government of Sri Lanka as a whole, in addressing challenging issues. To this end, it is also important for LKI, to ensure that research produced by LKI maintain standards for accuracy, independence and impartiality. The Cabinet Memorandum of establishment designates LKI as an independent and autonomous research institute. This prerogative of LKI to engage in independent research is essential to maintain the credibility of the institute.

As we commemorate the 18th death anniversary of the Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar, let us pay tribute to the remarkable legacy of this statesman, diplomat, and lawyer who lived a life of dedication to serving our country and made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of our beloved motherland.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is my humble duty to inaugurate the LKI Foreign Policy Forum in the respectful memory of our Late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar.

Thank you.