

## Sri Lanka Celebrates World Habitat Day 2017 “Housing Policies: Affordable Homes” in Matara.



**2nd October 2017, Matara, Sri Lanka:** In Sri Lanka, the main National event to celebrate World Habitat Day 2017 was held in Matara district in the Southern Province. Held at the Sanath Jayasuriya grounds in Matara, the Chief Guest at the celebrations was Hon. Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Finance and Media. This important national event focussed on the 2017 World Habitat Day theme, “Housing Policies: Affordable Homes”.

Organised by the Ministry of Housing and Construction, the event drew the participation of over 2,000 community members. Addressing the gathering, the Hon. Sajith Premadasa, Minister of Housing and Construction stated that each family in Sri Lanka should have an appropriate home that is affordable, and that the state has a responsibility to support people to meet these expectations.

Hon. Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena, State Minister for State Enterprises, Hon. Buddhika Pathirana, Member of Parliament and Co-Chairman of the District Development Council, the Country Programme Manager of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Mr Chanaka Talpahewa, also participated at the event. Representatives from housing and urban sector agencies, Mr. Pradeep Ratnayake, District Secretary of Matara, Mrs.W.K.K.Athukorala, Secretary of Ministry of Housing and Construction and senior officers of the Ministry of Housing and Construction in Sri Lanka were also present.

Mr. Chanaka Talpahewa sharing the UN-Habitat Executive Director’s message, stated “Today, 1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing, of which 1 billion live in slums and informal settlements. And while millions of people lack suitable homes, the stock of vacant houses is gradually increasing. Ensuring housing affordability is therefore a complex issue of strategic importance for development, social peace and equality.” He further stated that addressing the housing needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, especially women, youth and those who live in slums should be a priority in development agendas.

The event also featured song and dance presentations by local school children and concluded with the handing over of prizes to school children for art and essay competitions, presentation of “Sevana” loans and grants, toolkits for construction sector trainees, as well as house ownership documents to residents.

In addition to the main event, the Ministry of Housing and Construction organised a series of events to celebrate “Urban October” week including a seminar on “Housing Policies – Affordable Homes” for professionals in Matara on urbanisation issues including disaster resilient housing, planning sustainable settlements and smart waste management. A number of organisations including the National Building Research Organisation, UN-Habitat, National Physical Planning Department, Central Environmental Agency, National Housing Development Authority and other agencies dealing with housing participated in the seminar.