In commemoration of the International Youth Day of 2022

Date : 12-08-2022

Today on the 12th of August 2022, we commemorate the International Youth Day which recognizes the role of the youth in education, community development, environmental groups, volunteering for different social projects and in tackling global issues. This Day was first established by the UN General Assembly in 1999 through a resolution whereby it endorsed the recommendation made by the "World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth" held at Lisbon in 1998. It was first celebrated on August 12, 2000, and ever since it is used to create awareness in society about the challenges and problems encountered by youth. Further, it is a day utilized to empower youth and enhance their representation in politics, and their ability to manage resources to address global problems.

In the current global socio-cultural trajectory, where the global discourse is very much based on sustainable development while focusing on concepts like 'intergenerational equity', the role of youth in realizing such goals becomes particularly important. Thus, youth need a seat at the table, as the success of the proposed resolutions for global issues very much rely on their contribution.

Accordingly, as the UN recognizes the importance of the contributions of all generations for the realization of sustainable development, the International Youth Day of 2022 is based on the theme of "Intergenerational Solidarity" to foster successful and equitable intergenerational relations and partnerships to ensure that "no one is left behind".

According to the UN, in 2016, youth made up almost a quarter of Sri Lanka's population: 4.64 million or 23.2 per cent. The National Youth Policy (2014) of Sri Lanka defines youth as anyone in the age group of 15-29 years. This marks a stark contrast from the UN's definition of youth which falls between the ages of 15-24 years of age. However, considering the fact that Sri Lanka has the highest proportion of older adults in the country, and the age of marriage rising amongst our population, the definition of youth being extended to encapsulate persons up to the age of 29 years is contextually justified.

In terms of a report published by the World Bank in 2021, 12.3% of the population in Sri Lanka is aged 60 or older, and that in just 15 years, 25% of Sri Lankans will be over 60. This demographic transition would have a significant impact on the country economically and socially, creating many challenges.

"By observing the recent events that took place in the country during the aragalaya, which was mainly led by the youth, I think all of us, regardless of our age, could form consensus that the Youth so very clearly and resoundingly demonstrated here - that they want to be involved in their future, the country's political process and to be taken seriously. Considering the fact that the prevailing economic crisis has a larger impact on their lives, it does not bode well for the country as a whole, if we dismiss their appeals", said Hon. Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, Member of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus.

"Making use of the theme for this year's commemoration of the International Youth Day, we must make this an opportunity to start a dialogue to foster better collaborations across generations by recognizing the stereotypes associated with ageism that work against different generations in

different ways and taking steps to counter such stereotypes," said Hon. Mrs. Kokila Gunawardana, a member of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus.

"On the one hand, we are quick to dismiss the opinions of the youth, due to a perceived lack of maturity and experience and on the other hand, the youth might dismiss the contributions of the older generations as the youth believe that the older generation is not attuned to the advancement of technology or have tunnel vision. We must strive towards a balance where generations accept and respect the input and contributions of one another", said Hon. Mrs. Rohini Kumari Wijeratne, a member of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus.

"I believe we should make this Day an occasion to remember the important role youth can play in framing the future stability of a country. The Women Parliamentarians' Caucus recognizes that it has a role to play in realizing a process by which more youth voices are heard and represented in the politics, particularly in decision-making entities. In its fight to create a level-playing field in politics and elections for women, the Women's Caucus has always made representations on behalf of the youth of the country, as we, as a group, realize how important it is for Parliament and other decision-making bodies to be more reflective and representative of the voices of people", said Hon. Dr. Sudarshini Fernandopulle, the Chairperson of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus.

In such circumstances, the theme for International Youth Day of 2022, Intergenerational Solidarity, aptly suits the current socio-cultural situation and discourse in Sri Lanka. Thus, the commemoration of the International Youth Day must not merely be made a day for reflection, but also for progressive action.