

Hon Minister, ladies and gentlemen

I have a love affair with this country since more than twelve years. I was sent here, in 2005, to work in the East Coast as head of the monitoring mission in Batticaloa. I still every day remember what I had to experience but most of all what the people of this country have experienced.

I am impressed on how fast things are moving here. Colombo is a vibrant city and Sri Lanka is soon a trendy hub in the region.

In the Sweden-Sri Lanka Business Council which I am representing we are many people who have long relations Sri Lanka - Sweden. We have believed in this country even during troubled times, and we still believe.

The member companies are investing and would like to invest more.

Many Swedish companies are here in Sri Lanka and we see an increased interest. But it will not come automatically.

One example is food where both small and medium sized companies want to find partners here in Sri Lanka

As investors in Sri Lanka we have enjoyed the fast improvements in infrastructure over the last years - in particular roads and internet. More can of course be done and Sweden has many companies who can assist.

Sri Lanka is easy to visit – both for business and leisure.

There are excellent flight connections between our countries. So Sri Lanka is not far away.

Sweden-Sri Lanka Business Council will assist those interested. We have presence in many parts of Sweden with businessmen who are committed to help both Swedish and Sri Lanka companies.

Stockholm is Europe's fastest growing capital city, population-wise. Sweden is a strong economic hub in the Nordic region, a region as if it were one economy it would be the fifth largest in Europe and the 11-12 largest in the world. Among the cities with the most global headquarters, Stockholm is ranked as number ten worldwide and number 3 in Europe.

With a strong economy the Swedish market should be more of interest for Sri Lankan companies for both import and export plus knowledge transfer. Sweden alone stands for 50% of the Sri Lankan export to the Nordic countries.

Swedish companies stand for long term commitment, high quality and honesty.

To my Government I would also like to add and say that we should be grateful for all our entrepreneurs who work hard and takes risk when exploring new markets – they are helping building our welfare back home.

There are increased number of Swedish tourist visiting this paradise island – and they are also spending more than the average European. A tourist today is might be a businessman tomorrow.

Unfortunately, Sri Lankan high quality products are not that well known in Sweden. Much more can be done when it comes marketing

I can visit my local supermarket and find hundreds of products from Thailand and India but very few from Sri Lanka. In the Swedish capital of Stockholm there is not a single Sri Lankan restaurant but everyone who has been here loves the food.

Our council recently took initiative, together with Embassy of Sri Lanka in Stockholm and Open Trade Gate to a seminar about sustainable food production in Sri Lanka. Some of the biggest food retailers came to listen. We have opened the doors now it is the companies in Sri Lanka who has to deliver.

It takes time – a single fair or a high level visit will not do it alone. More cooperation between our countries is needed.

The council will assist and we have the support from Swedish authorities our government - Business Sweden, Open Trade Gate etc. We are also working closely with Department of Commerce, EDB, BOI, Sri Lanka Embassy in Stockholm and Ceylon Chamber of Commerce.

But most of all we get strength from the Sri Lankan people who has to take care of this precious country.