Mr. Chairman,

The delegation of Sri Lanka congratulates you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. May I take this opportunity to assure you of our fullest cooperation with your work. We also wish to express our appreciation for the contributions of His Excellency Ambassador George Wilfred Talbot, Permanent Representative of Guyana to the UN, Chair of the General Assembly's Second Committee of its 67th Session, and other members of the Bureau for their excellent work.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Fiji on behalf of the G-77 and China.
Mr. Chairman,

The overall theme for the 68th Session outlined by the President of the General Assembly has provided thematic guidelines to the Second Committee. World leaders, during the recent General Debate of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly, have reiterated the need to identify priorities as we develop the stage for the post-2015 development agenda, especially during the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the next stage. The commitment to the MDGs brought a real sense of optimism. However, numerous multilateral processes must converge to create a single and coherent post-2015 development agenda to continue the progress made by the MDGs while adapting to the challenges of the future.

The post 2015 Development Agenda must be an intergovernmental process, in line with the outcomes and agreed principles of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). As the developing world progresses, centuries uncontrolled growth in advanced economies have left little carbon space for the developing world. Balancing economic growth and simultaneously ensuring environmental responsibility will therefore remain a great challenge. In this context, it is critical that developed countries honor their commitments and balance the damage that they did to the environment based on common but differentiated responsibilities.

New institutional arrangements that were created by Rio+20, including the High – Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, are now in place with the highest level political commitment by the Member States. The work of the HLPF must be substantively supported by the Second Committee due to the interconnectedness of key focal areas. As we did during the previous session, we must also engage
the ECOSOC and the Third Committee constructively if we are to synergize resources to deliver tangible outcomes, which would result in significant differences to the lives of people across the world.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka has done well socially and economically. The socio-economic achievements in Sri Lanka are the result of people-centric policies. Our vision has been aimed at distributing the benefits of growth across all segments of the population. Statistics speak for themselves. Sri Lanka was ranked as “high” out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index in 2012. Absolute poverty in Sri Lanka declined to 6.5% in 2012 from 15.2%, over a period of five years, surpassing the MDG mid-term target.

The early recognition of the crucial role of women in political leadership is demonstrated by Sri Lanka producing the first elected Woman Prime Minister. Sri Lanka has been rated 16th in the world Gender Parity Index in 2010.

We will easily achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2015. Increased investments in educational infrastructure have resulted in a drastic reduction in the unemployment level.

The infant mortality rate of 9.4 per 1,000 live births, is on par with many affluent countries. Our accomplishments in healthcare have been highlighted by UNICEF as a success story.

However, all these accomplishments required much effort as we were challenged by one of the most ruthless terrorist groups in the world, and we had also to deal with the 2004 Asian tsunami and the global food, energy and financial crises.
Mr. Chairman,

Let me outline only a few key areas:

First, we must not dilute the focus on the MDGs as well as the fast-tracking of countries that are still lagging behind. Although appreciable progress has been made in achieving the MDGs, results reflect inequalities among and within countries. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia will be home to approximately 40% of the developing world’s poor by 2015. We must collectively examine the causes for failure in this regard.

Secondly, a comprehensive structural reform of the existing imperfect global economic order needs to be fully addressed to reflect current realities. Calls for reforms in the current international financial institutions continue to be relevant. Ad-hoc policies of those institutions will no longer be effective if they cannot accommodate emerging global socio-development challenges. The world needs a fair international economic order. Partnerships for development must be explored. South-South Cooperation is crucial due to the shift in the global economic power.

Sri Lanka fully supports the role of a rules-based multilateral trading system under the WTO for achieving the development goals of developing countries. Sri Lanka believes that a transparent, rules-based system under the WTO can contribute to the integration of developing countries into the global multilateral trading system, through inter alia, the encouragement of a level playing field. It is also important to stress that WTO Member countries are at varying levels of economic development, and that developing countries should be allowed the full use of flexibilities available under the WTO rules. Developing countries need the right to maintain appropriate policy space to achieve their development goals. They must also enjoy the right to maintain appropriate policy
space as the opportunities in global trade will enable them to finance their domestic development agenda, in the context of uncertain ODA commitments of development partners.

Thirdly, it is also important to recognize the critical needs of Middle Income Countries, while not forgetting the particular vulnerability of Least Developed Countries. MICs have the world’s largest workforce and agricultural and industrial capabilities. These are valuable assets as well as potentially volatile challenges. Areas such as industrial development and sustainable employment can be leveraged for co-operation among MICs and with LDCs.

Fourthly, increased investment in human resources development remains a great challenge for many countries in the context of constraints, such as those created by population growth and climate change. However, it is imperative to create a solid and sustainable human resource base for the future. Sri Lanka has therefore mainstreamed youth in its post 2015-development agenda, and is at the forefront of advocating the interests of youth. Sri Lanka will be hosting the Commonwealth Youth Forum 2013, this November and the World Conference on Youth in May 2014. His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, in his recent address to the UN General Assembly called upon the United Nations to declare an International Skills day as recognition of skills development of youth. This approach would undoubtedly support the Second Committee agenda item on Human Resources Development. We welcome active engagement by all stakeholders in this endeavour.

ICT for development is another area of Sri Lanka’s interest. ICT has proved to be a successful catalyst for enhancing and accelerating development in a wide range of areas. This year’s Second
Committee Resolution must therefore support the ever-increasing demand to give effect to the WSIS Tunis Agenda, which demands active engagement of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders. National level policies and strategies, including those of my own country, have narrowed down the digital divide and reduced the cost of intermediaries in supply chains. Therefore, we may explore avenues in reinvesting those savings in critical areas of ICT for development such as enhancing ICT literacy and multilingual applications and tools for many different users with a variety of technological backgrounds and abilities. Innovative and green employment opportunities, low-cost ICT tools and management information systems can contribute immensely in bettering living standards. Sri Lanka has not only encouraged private entrepreneurs to invest in ICT with significant concessions, but has also ensured a conducive regulatory framework. ICT provides an effective vehicle for achieving many of the MDGs by providing citizens with the necessary tools for establishing productive, fruitful lives. By making ICT development and accessibility a priority, countries will be able to more effectively and efficiently attain better standards of living.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, this Committee has also within its mandate the subject of “Maintenance of International Peace and Security with special reference to the Permanent Sovereignty of Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory”. Sustainable peace in the region is a critical factor for the maintenance of international peace and security. Therefore, we should not delay the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Sri Lanka fully supports the implementation of all relevant UN Resolutions on Palestine that would pave the way for the achievement of Palestinian membership in this organization.

I thank you.