

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Visit of Hon. Foreign Minister to Italy**

Hon. TilakMarapana, Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Italy from 01 – 03 March 2019, and held bilateral discussions on 01<sup>st</sup> March at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Hon. Manlio Di Stefano, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic.

During discussions, the Hon. Minister thanked the Italian government for the cooperation and assistance rendered by the Italian side and reiterated that the two countries have maintained excellent bilateral relations over the years and it is time to build and strengthen this relationship.



*Caption: Staff of the Embassy of Sri Lanka greet Hon. TilakMarapana, Minister of Foreign Affairs*

The Foreign Minister stated that Sri Lankan expatriate workers are required to make a pension contribution amounting to around 9 percent of their salary and qualify for a pension after working for 20 years. They collect this contribution together with the employer's contribution only upon their reaching 68 years of age. He stressed that in such circumstances many of the workers do not get to enjoy this benefit as most of them work only for about 4-5 years in the country.

He requested the Italian authorities to consider adjusting this scheme so that a person would receive his contribution immediately upon relinquishing his employment in Italy, irrespective of the number of years worked or having to wait until he has reached 68 years. If there were no legal constraints, he requested the Italian authorities to consider exempting expatriate workers from contributing to this pension scheme.



*Caption: Hon. TilakMarapana, Minister of Foreign Affairs holds bilateral discussions with Hon. ManlioDi Stefano, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*

The Minister also brought to the attention of the Italian authorities the difficulties faced by Sri Lankans to submit their visa applications through the outsourced processing agency to obtain visas to enter Italy as tourists or to visit relatives. The Italian Undersecretary agreed to ease the difficulties encountered by Sri Lankan visa applicants.

The Hon. Foreign Minister further requested that the Italian government should consider providing employment to Sri Lankan skilled workers which include, especially the IT professionals, nurses, healthcare supporters as Sri Lanka provides special certifications and training in these areas for the workers aimed at foreign employment.

The Hon. Minister highlighted and appreciated the support extended by Italy as a member of the European Union towards the lifting of the ban on fisheries exports of Sri Lanka to the EU in 2016 and restoration of GSP plus facility to Sri Lanka in May 2017.

During discussions both sides emphasized the excellent people to people relations that have grown stronger over the years. Hon. Minister Marapana stated that the Sri Lankan community in Italy continues to play an important role in further strengthening our bilateral ties. He also stressed the fact that Italy in turn plays an important role within the Sri Lankan Catholic community who have brought back with them to Sri Lanka a part of Italian culture.

In the area of trade and economic cooperation Hon. De Stefano stressed that the Italian business community is willing and open towards reaching new markets and in the case of Sri Lanka it is very necessary to build and project the market trust in order that the Italian business sector may establish businesses in Sri Lanka. The Hon. Foreign Minister requested the Italian side to encourage the small and medium enterprises to set up operations in Sri Lanka for the sectors identified such as textile and apparel, leather footwear, confectioneries, gem and jewellery and food processing.



*Caption: Hon. TilakMarapana meets members of the Sri Lankan community in Italy.*

The Hon. Minister later met members of the Sri Lankan community in Italy at a community meeting and discussed a range of issues pertaining to social and economic aspects of the community members. The Sri Lankan community in Italy presently comprise around 120,000 residing in different parts of Italy.

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