It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this LED Seminar for manufacturers organized by the Regional Centre for Lighting, which is hosted within the Sri Lanka Sustainable Energy Authority. After a three decades of conflict, we are now getting ready for next challenge, the economic development. A 'Suba Anagathayak' for all. In order to achieve this, promotion of economic development activities, sharing know-how of new technologies, tooling entrepreneurs with technical competencies are very important. Therefore, I see a great value in programs similar to this one lead by the RCL.

But this seminar has much more value beyond this simple economic theory. The electricity sector in Sri Lanka is advancing rapidly, both in terms of the demand for electricity and the level of penetration of services. In-line with the Mahinda Chintana, we had planned to electrify 95% of the households in Sri Lanka by 2016. However, due to the rapid pace of rural electrification programs, target is now revised to provide "electricity for all" by 2012. We do believe that the proposed target is feasible by providing electricity from the grid to the majority of the population and for those few in the far corners unable to receive grid electricity; we will be providing off-grid electricity using non-conventional renewable energy sources.

Providing electricity to all does not overcome all challenges; as an example in Sri Lanka we experience very high peak load during the period 6.30 – 9.30 p.m. This creates very high network loses due to high current draw over long distances. This is an enormous challenge for the utility and to the national economy, to infuse and maintain the necessary generation and transmission during this peak load period. However, a more uniform load throughout the day would make the existing power plants operate more evenly, thus reducing the necessity for adding new power plants and expanding the network capacity to address this high peak load problem.

In the households, the main use of electricity is for Lighting which occurs during the peak load period. Use of energy efficient lighting technologies can lead to reduction of load. Lately, the advances in solid state lighting technologies such as LED, have demonstrated significant load reduction in advanced countries. We too can benefit from LED technology. However, to adopt this solution and achieve high levels of success in Sri Lanka and the region we need to understand the intricate details of this new rapidly advancing technology, component sourcing, assembly and effective use. In this transformation, we must ensure our markets and our consumers are protected from substandard products, which could become a burden to our resources.

Therefore, we are extremely fortunate to have the Regional Centre for Lighting (RCL) in Sri Lanka and working within the Sri Lanka Sustainable Energy Authority. We are thankful to the South Asia Regional Initiative in Energy funded by USAID, for initiating this idea and helping us establish the center, funding and linking us with our knowledge partner, The Lighting Research Centre of the Rensselear Polytechnic Institute of New York, USA; the world's leading authority in Lighting, and particularly in the area of solid state lighting. We do appreciate the corporation and assistance provided by the RCL team in corporation with the LRC, led by Dr. Narendran.

I have come to know that Lighting Research Centre is researching not only on energy efficiency and new technologies, but also on the effective use of light via energy efficient lighting designs. In addition LRC has effects of lighting on the environment and health. I am sure RCL will tap into these resources and help our country and the region.

It is very encouraging to see RCL has established itself within this short period of time, having conducted several capacity building activities, initiating field research, networking with similar minded institutions. More importantly, the ground work has now already being laid to have a world class facility in training and demonstrating lighting technologies and practices, and to establish a photometry laboratory to serve not only the Sri Lanka but to the whole of South Asia. I believe the sustainable Energy Authority will take great efforts to make this dream, which is a dire need in the region, also a reality within a very short time

frame. And the at the same time we could also be proud in our own humble way, leading the way for the rational and efficient use of lighting for the whole of the South Asia and beyond. I and my ministry will extend all its support to this great cause and we eagerly expect RCL will develop fast as planned and contribute to the economic development and well being of the people.