Honorable Chief Justice Pieris, your lordships and distinguished guests,

Twelve years ago at the Earth Summit, a Declaration on Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability was adopted. Environmental law was recognized as essential for the protection of natural resources and ecosystems. A strong and independent judiciary and judicial process were cited as vital for the
development and enforcement of environmental law. Today, through your effort and conviction, you have brought environmental justice to the forefront of sustainable development. Your lordships are as critical to this process of sustainable development as an environmental expert who spends time on the field. Here at this Roundtable I saw that you have the Li and the Chi - Li being the notion, Chi being the force - to take this forward as much as it takes, as long as it takes!

We at the Asian Development Bank finance development to support economic growth, which is both inclusive and environmentally sustainable. In this, we recognize the need to help the judiciary in addressing these challenges. So, on behalf of the Asian Development Bank, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, led by the Honorable Chief Justice Pieris for hosting this Roundtable. We greatly appreciate the strong support of Sri Lanka’s judiciary. We would also like to thank the support given by His Excellency, President Rajapaksa who graced our opening ceremony yesterday.
Towards the end of this 3rd Roundtable, please allow me to briefly recall the previous Roundtables in an effort to establish a link between each. In Bhurban 2 years ago, we saw the start of the judiciary’s efforts at improving environmental justice in the region. The judges of South Asia debated major issues and challenges in the environmental law and policy, adjudication, education and capacity. As a result, the Bhurban Declaration noted the pivotal role of the judiciary in resolving environmental issues while equally recognizing the role of other stakeholders in relation to enforcement. The Declaration further provided for the continued collaboration, capacity building, and cooperation among the South Asian judiciaries.

A little over a year later, we met in Thimpu for the 2nd Roundtable. Continuing the on-going dialogue, the judges, lawyers, and experts from various fields and disciplines discussed issues like climate change, environment and health, and constraints faced by the judiciary. Through the Thimpu Declaration the judges
recognized the specialized nature of environmental issues that warrants specialized treatment. Taking a step further, the participants committed to adopt an MoU for further collaboration on information exchange, capacity building, and strengthening the judiciary’s focus on environmental issues.

Today in Colombo, we have taken another step forward by holding the 3rd Roundtable and continuing the work and dialogue started in Bhurban and Thimpu. These past two days have exemplified a renewed commitment from the judiciaries of South Asia for the continued protection of nature and the promotion of environmental justice and also highlighting the need to strike a balance between economic progress and protecting the environment. The participants reached consensus on the Colombo Action Plan. This plan articulates activities on judicial training and capacity enhancement, regional integration and cooperation, the efficacy of the justice system for environmental justice, and the use of ADR for better environmental dispute management. There are
some concrete steps there which we hope that your lordships can favorably consider going forward.

Many people have worked hard to make this Roundtable a success. Our sincere thanks again go to the Honorable Chief Justice Pieris, and the rest of the team from the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka lead by Mr. Amal Randeniya for their assistance and cooperation in hosting this Roundtable. I would also like to thank ADB’s team from the Office of the General Counsel, led by Ms. Irum Ahsan, and supported by Harsha Fernando, Emie Tolentino, Grip Bueta, Ces and Mahallah, for all their efforts in making this event possible.

We have indeed been honored to have so many distinguished guests join us in Colombo. We hope that you found the Roundtable as constructive as we did and we look forward to future cooperation. Indeed, with efforts like this, the legal fraternity can provide hope for a greener and more sustainable tomorrow.

Thank you again and enjoy the rest of the evening.