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Government Notifications

NOTIFICATION

Upcountry Charter - 2024

AS PER the Cabinet Decision dated 2 September 2024 and bearing number 24/1672/611/034, the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka has adopted this “Upcountry Charter” as the preliminary document to ensure the full integration of the Malaiyaha plantation community into the socio economic fabric of Sri Lanka.

This Charter is hereby notified as an officially promulgated document of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. It shall be the basis for and shall guide all present and future programmes and policies of the Government in respect of the Malaiyaha plantation community.

JEEVAN THONDAMAN,  
Minister of Water Supply and Estate  
Infrastructure Development.

Ministry of Water Supply and Estate Infrastructure Development,  
Colombo 03.  
19th September 2024.





# The Upcountry Charter

**Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.**

**2024**

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### Preamble

**THIS CHARTER** is prepared in recognition of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Indian Origin Tamil (**IOT**) (**Malaiyaha Tamils**) plantation community (**plantation community**) to Sri Lanka.

**WHEREAS**, over the past two centuries, the plantation community has played a pivotal role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Sri Lanka. Their hard work and dedication have been instrumental in transforming Sri Lanka into one of the world's leading tea producers, contributing significantly to the nation's economy and global standing.

**WHEREAS**, the tea industry, driven by the labour of the plantation community, has not only brought economic prosperity but has also shaped the social and cultural landscape of Sri Lanka.

**WHEREAS**, the vibrant culture, rich traditions, and resilience of the plantation community have become integral parts of the Sri Lankan identity.

**WHEREAS**, despite their invaluable contributions, the Government recognises that the plantation community has historically faced marginalisation, with limited access to land, education, healthcare, and other essential services. This marginalisation has perpetuated cycles of poverty and social exclusion, leaving the community with limited opportunities for upward mobility and full integration into the broader Sri Lankan society.

**THIS CHARTER** is in recognition of the immense contributions made by the plantation community to Sri Lanka and is a commitment by the Government of Sri Lanka to rectify historic hardships and wrongs faced by the community.

**THIS CHARTER** sets out a comprehensive framework for the full integration and upliftment of the plantation community, ensuring that they enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and benefits as all other citizens of Sri Lanka.

**THIS CHARTER** is not only a recognition of past contributions but also a forward-looking document that aims to build a more inclusive and equitable society for future generations.

**THIS CHARTER** is a declaration of the Government's intent to ensure that the plantation community is no longer marginalised but is instead recognised, respected, and integrated into the socio-economic fabric of the nation. By committing to the initiatives outlined in this Charter, the Government of Sri Lanka is taking concrete actions to ensure that the plantation community is no longer marginalised but is fully integrated into the nation's socio-economic fabric.

**THIS CHARTER** is a testament to the Government's dedication to creating a just and fair society where every citizen, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to thrive.

## CHAPTER 1

### Vision Statement

The Government of Sri Lanka envisions a future where the Plantation community is fully integrated into the nation's socio - economic fabric, enjoying equal rights opportunities, and benefits as all other citizens. This vision is anchored in the principles of equity, dignity, and empowerment, aiming to rectify historical injustices and build a prosperous, inclusive society.

The Government's vision is one where the plantation community is no longer seen as a marginalised group but as an integral part of the national identity, contributing to and sharing in the prosperity if the country.

The vision also recognises the need for systemic change. It acknowledges that addressing the issues faced by the plantation community requires more than just surface- level interventions; it requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that tackles the root cause of inequality and exclusion. This includes reforming existing policies, creating new opportunities for economic and social advancement, and ensuring that the voices of the plantation community are heard and respected in national decision - making processes,

The Government is committed to ensuring that future generations of the plantation community have the same opportunities for success as any other citizen of Sri Lanka. This includes access to quality education, healthcare, housing and employment opportunities, as well as the ability to fully participate in the cultural and social life of the country.

## CHAPTER 2

### Recognition of Contributions

**The Government of Sri Lanka formally acknowledges** the immense contributions of the plantation community to the nation's economy and social and cultural fabric.

**The Government recognises** that the plantation community has been instrumental in making Sri Lanka one of the world's leading tea producers, thereby earning significant foreign exchange and sustaining the livelihoods of thousands of families.

**The Government recognises** that the prosperity enjoyed by many sectors of Sri Lankan society today is, in no small part, due to the sweat, and toil of plantation workers who, despite their invaluable contributions, have often been denied the recognition and rewards they deserve.

**The Government recognises** that beyond their economic contributions, the IOT/ Malaiyaha community has also enriched the cultural and social landscape of Sri Lanka. Their traditions, festivals, and cultural practices have become an integral part of the nation's diverse cultural tapestry. The Government is committed to ensuring that this cultural heritage is preserved and celebrated as part of the broader Sri Lankan identity.

**The Government also recognises** the significant social contributions made by the plantation community. Despite challenging living conditions and historic social exclusion, the community has shown remarkable resilience and solidarity, maintaining

strong family and community ties, and contributing to the social fabric of the nation. The Government. commits to honouring these contributions by ensuring that the community is fully integrated into the national social framework, with access to the same rights, privileges, and opportunities as other citizens.

**The Government acknowledges** that these contributions have often been overlooked or undervalued and that this has contributed to the systemic inequalities faced by the community.

This Charter is a commitment to rectifying these wrongs and ensuring that the contributions of the plantation community are recognised and rewarded in a meaningful way.

## CHAPTER 3

### National Commitments

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to addressing the historical and ongoing challenges faced by the plantation community.

These commitments are rooted in the recognition of the immense contributions made by the plantation community to the nation's economy and social and cultural fabric.

These commitments are also rooted in the recognition of the urgent need to rectify the social and economic disparities that have persisted for generations between the plantation community and wider Sri Lankan society.

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to further develop and implement the following policies and initiatives to realise the vision for the plantation community.

These commitments are designed in promote equity, dignity, and full integration of the plantation community into Sri Lankan society.

## CHAPTER 4

### Land and Housing

#### 4.1 Land Ownership

The issue of land ownership is particularly critical given the historical context in which the plantation community has lived. For decades, plantation workers have lived in line rooms provided by the estate companies, with no legal ownership or security of tenure. This has left them vulnerable to eviction and has perpetuated a cycle of poverty and dependency.

The Government will take action to provide a plot of land to every plantation worker family for occupancy. This allocation of land is not just about providing physical space to live but about restoring dignity and a sense of belonging to a community that has long been deprived of land ownership.

Mechanisms will also be established to convert any existing land permits held by estate workers into freehold land deeds.

Land ownership is a fundamental right and a crucial step toward economic empowerment, allowing families to build secure homes, cultivate their own crops, promote additional income generation and create a stable foundation for future generations.

By granting land ownership, the Government is committed to break, the cycle of poverty and dependency and to provide the community with the means to achieve greater economic and social independence.

Moreover, this policy will help to address the long-standing issues of overcrowding and inadequate housing in the plantation sector. By providing each family with a plot of land, the Government will enable the construction of more spacious and dignified homes, improving living conditions and promoting better health and well-being among the community.

## 4.2 Housing

Many plantation workers live in cramped, substandard housing (**line rooms**) that lacks basic amenities such as clean - water, sanitation, and electricity. This has had a detrimental impact on their health, education, and overall well-being.

A comprehensive housing policy will be formulated to replace line rooms with dignified housing units. These new homes may be funded either through private financing, Government grants or Government backed loans and should be equipped with essential services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity, and built to withstand the environmental challenges of the upcountry region. Special attention will be given to ensuring that these housing units are close to existing places of employment to reduce the burden on workers.

The Government recognises that the development of new housing units is essential to improving the quality of life for the plantation community.

## 4.3 Conversion of Settlements into Villages

For decades, plantation settlements have existed as isolated enclaves, controlled by the plantation companies and largely excluded from the benefits of national development. This has left the community with limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, further entrenching their marginalisation.

The Government is committed to converting the current settlements within the estates into recognised and sustainable villages. This initiative will involve taking these settlements out of the control of plantation companies and integrating them into the national administrative framework, thereby providing the residents with full access to Government services and infrastructure. This includes access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, roads, and public transportation, as well as Government-run schools and healthcare facilities. The integration of these settlements into the national administrative framework will also provide residents with greater political representation and influence, enabling them to advocate for their rights and needs more effectively.

This move is crucial for ensuring that the plantation community has the same rights and opportunities as other rural communities in Sri Lanka.

Additionally, this policy will help to break the dependency of the plantation community on the plantation companies. By transferring control of the settlements to the Government, the community will gain greater autonomy and the ability to make decisions about their own development. This is a crucial step towards empowering the community and ensuring that they have a say in the policies and programmes that affect their lives.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Employment**

The Government recognises the employment within the plantation community has historically been centred around the daily wage model, which has proven to be unsustainable and detrimental to the long-term well being of workers.

The Government of Sri Lanka recognises the need to transition to more sustainable and equitable employment models that ensure the protection of workers' rights and provide them with opportunities for upward mobility.

#### **5.1 Sustainable Employment Models**

The daily wage model has long been criticised for its inherent instability and its failure to provide workers with a living wage. Under this model, workers are paid based on the amount of work they complete each day, with no guarantees of consistent income or job security. This has left many plantation workers living in poverty, with little hope of improving their economic situation.

The Government is committed to transition away from the daily wage model to more equitable systems such as the out-grower and small holder models. These models will empower workers by providing them with ownership stakes in the land they cultivate, thereby enhancing their financial security and social standing.

The transition to more sustainable employment models is essential addressing these issues. The out-grower model, for example, allows workers to own and cultivate their own plots of land, with the plantation company providing technical support, inputs, and access to markets. This model provides workers with greater control over their livelihoods, as well as the potential to earn higher incomes based on their productivity. It also encourages the development of entrepreneurial skills and sense of ownership among workers.

Similarly, the small holder model allows workers to own larger plots of land and operate as independent farmers, supplying produce to the plantation company or selling it on the open market. This model provides even greater opportunities for economic empowerment, as workers can diversify their income sources and invest in their own businesses.

The Government will provide support to workers who wish to transition to these models, including access to credit, training, and technical assistance.



These models also have the potential to address some of the broader challenges facing the plantation sector, such as declining productivity and the need for more sustainable agricultural practices. By empowering workers in take greater ownership of their land and livelihoods, these models can contribute to the long-term viability of the sector and the well-being of the community.

## 5.2 Labour Rights and Social Security

The Government will enforce strict regulations to ensure that plantation companies comply with labour laws, including the provision of Employee's 'Provident Fund (EPF) and Employees', Trust Fund (ETF) benefits to all workers. This will include workers involved in out-grower models, who have often been excluded from such benefits.

The enforcement of labour rights is a critical component of the Government's commitment to improving the conditions of employment in the plantation sector. The Government recognises that workers have been denied basic rights and protections, including access to social security benefits such as EPF and ETF. This has left many workers without a safety net in times of need and has contributed to the cycle of poverty in the community.

The Government is committed to ensuring that all workers in the plantation sector, regardless of their employment model, have access to these benefits. This includes workers involved in out-grower and small holder models, who have often been excluded from social security programmes due to their status as independent contractors. The Government will work with plantation companies and other stakeholders to develop mechanisms for extending social security coverage to all workers, including those who are self-employed or working in non-traditional employment arrangements.

In addition to social security benefits, the Government will enforce regulations related to working conditions, including hours of work, occupational health and safety, and the right to collective bargaining. This will help to ensure that workers are treated fairly and with dignity, and that they have the tools and resources they need to advocate for their rights. The Government will also strengthen the capacity of labour inspection services to monitor compliance with labour laws and take action against employers who violate workers' rights.

These measures are essential to improving the quality of employment in the plantation sector and ensuring that workers have access to the protections and benefits they are entitled to. They also reflect the Government's commitment to promoting decent work in the sector.

## 5.3. Negotiations with Plantation Companies

The relationship between workers and plantation companies has often been characterised by power imbalances and a lack of meaningful dialogue. Workers have had little say in the terms and conditions of their employment and this has resulted in exploitative practices, such as low wages, poor working conditions, and unfair pricing of produce.

The Government recognises the need for a more balanced and equitable relationship between workers and plantation companies. To this end, it will act as a mediator in negotiations between the two parties, ensuring that the voices of workers are heard and that their interests are taken into account.

In addition to economic issues, the Government will also address issues related to working conditions, including health and safety, access to training and development opportunities, and the right to organise and bargain collectively. By fostering a more collaborative and equitable relationship between workers and plantation companies, the Government aims to create a more sustainable plantation sector.

## CHAPTER 6

### Economic Upliftment

Economic upliftment is a critical component of the Government's vision for the plantation community. The goal is to create a diversified economy within the upcountry region that is not solely dependent on plantation work but also offers opportunities in other sectors.

#### 6.1 Creating New Employment Opportunities

The Government recognises that the economy of the upcountry region has been historically dominated by the plantation sector. This has resulted in fewer opportunities for workers to pursue other forms of employment and has limited their ability to improve their economic situation.

The Government recognises the need to create new employment opportunities in the upcountry region, particularly in sectors that offer higher wages, better working conditions, and greater opportunities for skills development. To this end, it will work with international partners to attract investment and establish new industries in the region. These industries could include manufacturing, agro-processing, tourism, and information technology, among others. The Government will also invest in infrastructure development, including roads, electricity, and telecommunications, to support the growth of these industries.

The diversification of industries in the upcountry region will not only provide new employment opportunities but will also contribute to the broader economic development of the region. It will help to raise living standards, reduce poverty, and create a more vibrant and diversified local economy. It will also provide workers with the opportunity to acquire new skills and pursue career paths that were previously unavailable to them.

#### 6.2 Entrepreneurship

The Government will promote entrepreneurship within the plantation community by providing training programmes, access to credit, and business development services. This will empower community members to start their own businesses and create jobs within their communities. The promotion of entrepreneurship is a key strategy for economic upliftment in the upcountry region. By encouraging community members to start their own businesses, the Government aims to create new sources of income and employment, reduce dependency on plantation work, and foster a culture of innovation and self-reliance.

The Government is committed to provide a range of support services to aspiring entrepreneurs, including training programmes in business management, financial literacy, and marketing. It will also work with financial institutions to improve access to credit for small businesses, particularly those owned by women and other marginalised groups. In addition, the Government will establish business development centres and societies and entrepreneurship incubation centres in the upcountry region to provide entrepreneurs with the technical assistance, mentoring, and networking opportunities they need to succeed.

The promotion of entrepreneurship will also help to stimulate local economic development by creating new markets for goods and services and by encouraging the growth of local supply chains. It will also contribute to the diversification of the local economy, increasing the community's resilience to economic shocks.

### 6.3 Public-Private Partnerships

The Government will encourage public-private partnerships to fund and implement economic development projects in the upcountry region. These partnerships will focus on building infrastructure, improving access to markets, and enhancing the overall economic environment in the region. Public-private partnerships (**PPPs**) are an important tool for promoting economic development in the upcountry region. By leveraging the resources and expertise of both the public and private sectors, PPPs can help to accelerate the implementation of development projects, improve the efficiency of service delivery, and attract investment to the region.

The Government will actively seek out partnerships with private sector companies, both domestic and international, to fund and implement key infrastructure projects in the upcountry region. This could include the construction of roads, bridges, and other transportation infrastructure; the development of water and sanitation systems; and the expansion of electricity and telecommunications networks. These projects will help to improve the quality of life for the plantation community, as well as create new economic opportunities by improving access to markets and services.

In addition to infrastructure development, the Government will also explore PPPs in areas such as education, healthcare, and agriculture. For example, partnerships with private sector companies could help to improve the quality of education and healthcare services in the upcountry region, or to promote the adoption of new agricultural technologies and practices. These partnerships will be carefully designed to ensure that they deliver tangible benefits to the plantation community and that they are aligned with the Government's broader development goals.

The promotion of PPPs will also help to build the capacity of local Government authorities and other public sector institutions in the upcountry region. By working with private sector partners, these institutions can gain valuable experience and expertise in project management, service delivery, and stakeholder engagement, which will help to improve their performance and sustainability in the long term.

## CHAPTER 7

### Health

The Government recognises that the health and well-being of the plantation community has been neglected, with many workers suffering from inadequate access to healthcare services.

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to rectifying this situation by implementing comprehensive health policies that address the specific needs of the plantation community.

#### 7.1 Cluster Hospitals

The Government will implement the cluster hospital concept, converting estate medical centres into cluster hospitals. These hospitals will provide a wide range of medical services, including emergency care, maternal and child health services, and treatment for chronic conditions. The Government will also seek funding for the acquisition of ambulances to serve these hospitals.

The cluster hospital concept involves the consolidation of multiple estate medical centres into larger, better-equipped hospitals that can provide a full range of medical services. These hospitals will be staffed by trained healthcare professionals and will be equipped with modern medical equipment and facilities. They will also be supported by a network of ambulances that can transport patients to the hospitals in case of emergency.

The cluster hospitals will focus on providing primary and secondary healthcare services, including preventive care, diagnosis, and treatment of common illnesses, maternal and child health services, and management of chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. They will also provide specialised services, such as mental health care, reproductive health services, and care for the elderly and disabled.

The Government will also work to improve the infrastructure and facilities at the cluster hospitals, including the provision of clean water, sanitation, and electricity. This will help to create a safe and hygienic environment for both patients and healthcare workers.

The implementation of the cluster hospital concept will help to improve health outcomes for the plantation community by providing them with access to high-quality healthcare services that are closer to home. It will also help to reduce the burden on the public healthcare system by providing care to a population that has historically been underserved.

#### 7.2 Mental Health and Well-being

Mental health has long been a neglected aspect of healthcare, despite the high levels of stress and mental health issues experienced by workers. The demanding nature of plantation work, coupled with the challenges of living in isolated and often impoverished conditions, has contributed to high rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems among the community.

The Government is committed to addressing this issue by integrating mental health services into the cluster hospitals and other community facilities. This will include the provision of counselling and psychological support services, as well as stress management programmes and initiatives to promote mental well-being. The Government will also work to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health problems.

### 7.3 Preventive Healthcare and Nutrition

The Government will implement programmes to raise awareness about preventive healthcare, including vaccination campaigns, health education, and nutrition programmes. Special attention will be given to addressing malnutrition among children and pregnant women, ensuring that they receive the necessary nutrients for healthy development.

Preventive healthcare is a critical component of the Government's strategy to improve health outcomes in the plantation sector. By focusing on prevention, the Government aims to reduce the burden of disease and improve the overall health and well-being of the community.

Nutrition is also a key focus of the Government's preventive healthcare strategy, given the high levels of malnutrition among children and pregnant women in the plantation sector. Malnutrition is a major contributor to poor health outcomes, including stunted growth, low birth weight, and increased susceptibility to illness. The Government will implement programmes to improve access to nutritious food, including the distribution of supplements and fortified foods, as well as programmes to promote breastfeeding and healthy feeding practices.

The Government will also work to address the underlying causes of malnutrition, such as poverty, food insecurity, and lack of access to clean water and sanitation. This will include initiatives to improve food production and distribution, as well as programmes to promote food security and reduce waste. The Government will also work with local communities to promote healthy eating habits and improve access to safe, nutritious food.

These preventive healthcare and nutrition programmes will help to reduce the incidence of illness and improve the overall health and well-being of the plantation community. They will also contribute to the long-term sustainability of the healthcare system by reducing the demand for curative services and improving health outcomes.

## CHAPTER 8

### Education

Education is a key pillar of the Government's vision for the plantation community, as it provides the foundation for long-term socio-economic development.

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to improving educational outcomes for the plantation community through comprehensive education reforms.

## 8.1 Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is critical to ensuring that children in the plantation sector have the best possible start in life. Research has shown that early childhood is a crucial period for brain development, and that high-quality early education can have long-lasting benefits for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

The Government will transform creches into early learning centres, providing children with a strong foundation for their future education. These centres will offer a stimulating learning environment, qualified teachers, and nutritious meals to support children's physical and cognitive development. The curriculum will also be designed to support the development of key skills, including language, literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving, as well as social and emotional skills.

The centres will also offer health and developmental screenings to identify any potential issues early on and provide appropriate interventions. The Government will also work to engage parents and caregivers in their children's early education, providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to support their children's learning and development at home.

The transformation of creches into early learning centres is a key component of the Government's strategy to improve educational outcomes in the plantation sector. By providing children with a strong foundation in the early years, the Government aims to ensure that they are well-prepared for success in primary school and beyond.

## 8.2 Primary and Secondary Education

Primary and secondary education are critical stages in a child's development and are essential for ensuring that children acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. However, the quality of education in the plantation sector has historically been poor, with inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and a shortage of trained teachers.

The Government is committed to addressing these issues by investing in the improvement of primary and secondary education in plantation areas. This will include upgrading school infrastructure, such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories and accommodation, to ensure that students and teachers have access to a safe and conducive teaching and learning environment. providing tri-lingual education (Sinhala, Tamil, English), and introducing smart classrooms equipped with modern technology.

In addition to infrastructure improvements, the Government will also focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in plantation schools. This will include the provision of tri-lingual education (Sinhala, Tamil, English) to ensure that students are proficient in all three languages and can compete effectively in the national and global job markets. The Government will also introduce smart classrooms equipped with modern technology, such as interactive whiteboards and digital learning platforms, to support personalised and adaptive learning.

The Government will also invest in teacher training and professional development to ensure that teachers in plantation schools are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to deliver high-quality instruction. This will include training in the use of technology in the classroom, as well as training in inclusive and differentiated teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of students.

These investments in primary and secondary education will help to improve educational outcomes for students in the plantation sector, ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in higher education and the workforce.

### 8.3 Higher Education and Skill Development

Higher education is a key driver of social and economic mobility, and the Government is committed to ensuring that students from the plantation community have access to high- quality higher education opportunities.

The Government will establish a university in Nuwara Eliya. This university will provide higher education opportunities to students from the plantation community, equipping them with the skills needed for the modern workforce. The establishment of a university in Nuwara Eliya will provide students in the upcountry region with access to higher education, especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and IT fields, which are critical to the future economic development of the region and the country as a whole. The university will offer a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in these fields, as well as opportunities for research and innovation.

The Government will also work to ensure that all universities are accessible to students from the plantation community, including through the provision of scholarships, financial aid, and other support services.

In addition to higher education, the Government will also promote vocational training programmes to prepare students for employment in various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and services. These programmes will provide students with the practical skills and hands-on experience they need to succeed in the workforce and will be aligned with the needs of local industries and employers. The Government will work with industry partners to develop and deliver these programmes, ensuring that they are relevant and responsive to the needs of the labour market.

The promotion of higher education and skill development will help to create new opportunities for students from the plantation community and will contribute to the long- term economic development of the upcountry region. It will also help to reduce the disparities in educational attainment and income between the plantation community and other groups in Sri Lanka.

## CHAPTER 9

### Child Welfare and Development

The Government of Sri Lanka acknowledges that children in the plantation sector face significant challenges that hinder their overall development and well-being. High levels of poverty, limited access to quality education and healthcare, and child protection issues are pervasive problems. The Government is committed to addressing these challenges through comprehensive child welfare and development policies aimed at promoting the rights of children and ensuring their protection and well-being.

#### 9.1 Access to Quality Education

Children in the plantation sector have historically faced barriers to accessing quality education, including inadequate school infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, and socio-economic constraints that force many children to drop out of school early. This lack of educational opportunities perpetuates the cycle of poverty and limits the prospects of children in the plantation community.

The Government is committed to ensuring access to quality education to all children in the plantation sector, to empowering them, ensuring they remain in school and providing them with the tools they need to build a better future.

The Government will work to improve educational infrastructure in the plantation sector, including building and upgrading schools, providing modern teaching aids, and ensuring access to clean water and sanitation facilities in schools.

#### 9.2 Child Protection and Safety

Child protection is a critical concern in the plantation sector, where children are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, child labour, and trafficking. The Government recognises that a robust child protection framework is essential for safeguarding children's rights and ensuring their safety and well-being.

The Government will strengthen the child protection framework in the plantation sector by enhancing the coordination between relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement, judiciary, health, and education sectors.

Comprehensive state-led mechanisms will be implemented to raise awareness, prevent, identify, and respond to child abuse, exploitation, and trafficking. These mechanisms will include awareness campaigns, accessible services such as counselling, medical care, and legal and psychosocial support for victims and at-risk children.

#### 9.3 Child Health and Nutrition

Malnutrition and poor health outcomes are prevalent among children in the plantation sector, contributing to stunted growth, cognitive delays, and higher susceptibility to illness. These issues are compounded by limited access to healthcare services and inadequate knowledge about proper nutrition and hygiene practices. Addressing the health and nutrition needs of children is crucial for ensuring their overall development and well-being.



The Government will implement comprehensive programmes to improve child nutrition, including school meal programmes that provide nutritionally balanced meals, particularly in areas with high rates of malnutrition.

Awareness and education campaigns will be conducted to promote proper dietary practices, breastfeeding, and hygiene among parents and caregivers. These campaigns will disseminate information on low-cost, nutritious foods and best practices for child nutrition.

The Government will work with health authorities to ensure that preventive healthcare services, such as vaccinations and health screenings, are readily available to children in the plantation sector. Additional efforts will be made to provide specialised health services for children who are malnourished or have chronic health conditions.

#### **9.4 Prevention of Child Labour**

Child labour remains a significant issue in the plantation sector, where economic pressures often force children to work instead of attending school. This not only deprives children of their right to education but also exposes them to dangerous and exploitative working conditions. The Government is committed to eradicating child labour and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to pursue their education and development without being forced into work.

The Government will strengthen the enforcement of existing child labour laws, ensuring that all forms of child labour are eliminated in the plantation sector.

The Government will also offer more vocational training and skills development programmes to children aged 16 and older, providing them with alternative pathways to employment and reducing the likelihood that they will drop out of school to seek work.

#### **9.5 Multi-Sectoral Collaboration**

Addressing the complex challenges faced by children in the plantation sector requires collaboration across multiple sectors, including education, health, law enforcement, and social services. The Government recognises that a coordinated and integrated approach is essential for ensuring the effectiveness of child welfare and development policies.

The Government will build capacity and enhance coordination among all relevant stakeholders, including Government agencies, law enforcement, judiciary, labour inspectors, employers, trade unions, civil society organisations, and community leaders to respond effectively to child welfare and protection issues. This will ensure that child protection laws are enforced and that child welfare services are delivered effectively across the plantation sector.

## CHAPTER 10

### Youth Empowerment

The youth of the plantation community represent a vital resource for the future of Sri Lanka. However, young people in the plantation sector face significant challenges, including limited access to quality education, lack of employment opportunities, and social and economic marginalisation. These challenges often hinder their ability to achieve their full potential and contribute to the development of their communities and the country. Recognising the importance of youth empowerment, the Government of Sri Lanka is committed to implementing policies and programmes that address these challenges and provide young people with the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed.

#### 10.1 Access to Education and Vocational Training

Education and vocational training are critical pathways to economic empowerment and upward mobility for youth in the plantation sector. However, many young people face barriers to accessing these opportunities due to financial constraints, lack of infrastructure, and social pressures to enter the workforce at an early age. The Government recognises that ensuring access to quality education and vocational training is essential for enabling young people to pursue meaningful careers and improve their socio-economic standing.

The Government will expand access to secondary and tertiary education in the plantation sector by establishing new educational institutions, upgrading existing schools, and providing scholarships and financial aid to ensure that all young people can continue their education beyond primary school.

Vocational training programmes will be offered, focusing on skills that are in demand in both the local and national job markets. These programmes will include training in fields such as information technology, hospitality, manufacturing, agriculture, and entrepreneurship.

The Government will also promote flexible and alternative education pathways, including online and distance learning, to accommodate the unique needs and circumstances of youth in the plantation sector. This will help to ensure that young people who are unable to attend traditional schools or training centres still have access to education and skill development opportunities.

#### 10.2 Employment and Entrepreneurship Opportunities

Youth unemployment is a major challenge in the plantation sector, where economic opportunities are often limited to low-wage and hazardous jobs. Many young people are forced to migrate to urban areas in search of work, leaving their communities behind and contributing to the brain drain in rural regions. The Government is committed to creating sustainable employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people in the plantation sector, enabling them to build successful careers and contribute to the economic development of their communities.

The Government will work with the private sector, civil society and development partners to create new employment opportunities for young people in the plantation sector. This will include promoting job creation in emerging industries such as information technology, tourism, and renewable energy, as well as in traditional sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing.

Entrepreneurship will be promoted as a key strategy for youth empowerment. The Government will provide training, mentorship, and access to credit for young entrepreneurs, enabling them to start and grow their own businesses. Special attention will be given to supporting young women entrepreneurs, who often face additional barriers to business ownership and financial independence.

Public-private partnerships will be established to support youth entrepreneurship initiatives, including business incubators, startup competitions, and mentorship programmes. These partnerships will help to connect young entrepreneurs with resources, networks, and markets, increasing their chances of success.

### 10.3 Leadership and Civic Engagement

The Government acknowledges that youth in the plantation sector often lack representation in decision-making processes and are excluded from leadership opportunities. This marginalisation limits their ability to influence policies and programmes that affect their lives and hinders their capacity to contribute to the development of their communities. The Government recognises that empowering youth to take on leadership roles and participate in civic life is essential for fostering a sense of agency and responsibility among young people, as well as for building stronger, more resilient communities.

The Government will work to strengthen civic spaces for youth participation in the plantation sector. This will include ensuring that youth are able to express their opinions, participate in community activities, and contribute to discussions on issues that affect them.

The Government will collaborate with civil society organisations and community leaders to promote youth participation at the local level, ensuring that youth have opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with policymakers and contribute to the development of their communities and the nation.

### 10.4 Social Inclusion and Mental Health

Many young people in the plantation sector face social exclusion and discrimination based on their ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender. This exclusion can lead to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and poor mental health outcomes. The Government recognises the importance of promoting social inclusion and mental health among youth in the plantation sector, ensuring that all young people feel valued, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

The Government will implement programmes to promote social inclusion and reduce discrimination against youth in the plantation sector. These programmes will focus on fostering a sense of belonging and community among young people, as well as raising awareness about the negative effects of discrimination and exclusion.

Mental health services will be expanded in the plantation sector, with a focus on providing support to young people who are experiencing stress, anxiety, depression substance abuse or other mental health challenges. These services will include counselling, peer support groups, and mental health education and rehabilitation programmes in schools and community centres

The Government will also promote positive youth development by supporting programmes that encourage healthy lifestyles, physical activity, and creative expression. These programmes will help to build resilience among young people and provide them with constructive outlets for their energy and creativity.

### 10.5 Promotion of Sports and Physical Activities

Sports and physical activities play a critical role in the holistic development of youth, promoting not only physical health but also mental well-being, teamwork, discipline, and leadership skills. However, access to sports facilities and organised sports programmes is often limited in the plantation sector, depriving young people of these valuable opportunities.

The Government recognises the importance of sports as a tool for youth empowerment and social cohesion and is committed to developing and promoting sports and physical activities as part of its broader strategy for youth development in the plantation community.

The Government is committed to investing in building and upgrading sports facilities in the plantation sector, including playgrounds, sports fields, and community centres. These facilities will be accessible to all young people and will provide safe spaces for recreational activities, team sports, and fitness programmes.

The Government will also promote the organisation of national sports programmes and competitions in the plantation regions and the participation of young people from the plantation sector in them, providing them with opportunities to showcase their talents and represent their communities on a national platform. Special attention will be given to ensuring that girls and young women have equal access to sports programmes and facilities.

The Government will also promote partnerships with sports organisations, civil society, and private sector sponsors to support the development of sports in the plantation sector, including the provision of equipment, coaching, and scholarships for promising athletes.

## CHAPTER 11

### Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

Women in the plantation community have made significant contributions to the agricultural and wider economy of Sri Lanka, particularly in the tea industry. Despite their contributions, they have often faced discrimination, exploitation, and gender-based violence.

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to recognising and uplifting the status of women in the plantation community by promoting gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination.

### 11.1 Recognition of Contributions

The Government formally acknowledges the crucial role played by women in the plantation sector. Their labour, particularly in the tea industry, has been a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's economy.

The Government commits to recognising these contributions in national economic policies and ensuring that women receive fair wages and working conditions.

Women in the plantation sector have historically been the backbone of the tea industry, performing the physically demanding work of tea plucking, which requires skill, precision, and endurance. Their contributions have been critical to maintaining the quality and reputation of Sri Lankan tea on the global market, and their labour has generated significant revenue for the country.

Despite their crucial role in the economy, women in the plantation sector have often been undervalued and underpaid, with limited opportunities for advancement. The Government is committed to addressing this injustice by ensuring that women in the plantation sector are recognised and rewarded for their contributions. This will include measures to promote gender equality in the workplace, such as equal pay for equal work, access to training and development opportunities, and support for women in leadership roles.

The Government will also work to ensure that the contributions of women in the plantation sector are recognised and celebrated in national economic policies and development plans. This will include initiatives to promote the visibility of women's work, as well as efforts to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality in the economy.

### 11.2 Ending Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue in the plantation sector, where women are often vulnerable to exploitation, harassment, and abuse. The Government is committed to addressing this issue through a comprehensive policy that includes prevention, protection, and support services for survivors.

The Government will prepare and implement a comprehensive policy to prevent and address gender-based violence (GBV) within the plantation community. This policy will be in line with the National Policy on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality. It will include setting up GBV response units within the cluster hospitals, providing legal assistance to survivors, and running awareness campaigns to educate the community about the rights of women and the importance of gender equality.

The establishment of GBV response units within the cluster hospitals is a key component of this policy. These units will provide a safe and supportive environment for survivors of GBV offering services such as medical care, psychological

counselling, and legal assistance. The units will also work closely with law enforcement agencies and community organisations to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that survivors receive the support they need to recover and rebuild their lives.

In addition to response services, the Government will also focus on prevention by running awareness campaigns to educate the community about the rights of women and the importance of gender equality. These campaigns will aim to change attitudes and behaviours that contribute to GBV, such as harmful gender norms, discrimination, and tolerance of violence. The Government will also work to strengthen legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect women's rights and prevent GBV.

The comprehensive policy on GBV will help to create a safer and more supportive environment for women in the plantation sector and will contribute to the broader goal of gender equality in Sri Lanka.

### 11.3 Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women

Socio-economic empowerment is a key strategy for improving the status of women in the plantation sector.

The Government will support the socio-economic empowerment of women by promoting entrepreneurship, providing access to credit, and offering training programmes in skills such as financial management and business development. These initiatives will enable women to start their own businesses and achieve financial independence. These programmes will also be designed to meet the specific needs and challenges faced by women in the plantation sector, including those related to access to finance, social and cultural barriers, and the balancing of work and family responsibilities.

By providing women with the resources and opportunities they need to start their own businesses, the Government aims to increase their income, improve their economic security, and reduce their dependency on plantation work.

The Government will also work with financial institutions to improve access to credit for women entrepreneurs, including through the provision of microfinance and other financial products tailored to their needs.

In addition to entrepreneurship, the Government will also support women's socio-economic empowerment through initiatives to promote employment and income-generating activities in other sectors. This could include programmes to train women in new skills, such as those needed for jobs in manufacturing, services, or tourism, as well as initiatives to improve working conditions and wages in these sectors.

The socio-economic empowerment of women in the plantation sector, is not only important for improving their individual well-being, but it is also critical for the broader economic development of the region. By increasing women's participation in the economy, the Government aims to create new sources of income and employment, reduce poverty, and promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

## 11.4 Combating Discrimination

The Government commits to ending all forms of discrimination against women from the plantation community. This includes ensuring equal access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The Government will also work to eliminate discriminatory practices within the workplace, such as unequal pay and job segregation.

The Government recognises that discrimination against women is a major barrier to their - social and economic advancement. Women have often been denied equal access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, and have faced discrimination in the workplace, including unequal pay, job segregation, and limited opportunities for advancement.

The elimination of discrimination against women in the plantation sector is essential for achieving gender equality and for ensuring that women can fully participate in and benefit from the social and economic development of Sri Lanka. By addressing the root causes of discrimination and promoting equal rights and opportunities, the Government aims to create a more just and equitable society for all.

## CHAPTER 12

### Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups

The Government of Sri Lanka recognises that within the plantation community, there are particularly vulnerable groups who face compounded challenges due to their social status, identity, or physical abilities. These include persons living in extreme poverty, those with disabilities or health conditions and persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The Government recognises that such vulnerable groups are often subjected to discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion within their communities. The Government is committed to promoting the full inclusion and protection of all such vulnerable groups, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their social status, identity, health or abilities, can fully participate in and benefit from the nation's development.

The inclusion of vulnerable groups is a critical aspect of building an equitable society. By addressing the specific challenges faced by such persons in the plantation sector, the Government aims to create a more inclusive and just society where everyone is valued and respected.

## 12.1 Creating an Inclusive Environment

Persons from vulnerable groups in the plantation sector face significant barriers to accessing education, employment, healthcare, and public services. These barriers are often compounded by stigma and discrimination, which limit their opportunities for full participation in society.

The Government recognises the need to create an inclusive environment that accommodates the needs of all persons and ensures that no one is left behind in the nation's development.

## 12.2 Access to Social Services and Legal Protections

Vulnerable groups within the plantation sector, often have limited access to social services and legal protections. This lack of access leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and neglect. The Government recognises the need to ensure that all members of the plantation community, particularly those who are most vulnerable, have access to the services and protections they need to live safe and dignified lives.

The Government is committed to enhance coordination among social service providers, law enforcement, and community organisations to ensure that vulnerable groups in the plantation sector have access to essential services, including healthcare, education, housing, and legal support.

Legal protections for vulnerable groups will be strengthened, with a focus on preventing discrimination, violence, and exploitation. The Government will work with civil society organisations and legal aid providers to ensure that such persons have access to justice and can exercise their rights without fear of retribution.

The Government will support community-led initiatives to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. This will include programmes that empower individuals to advocate for their rights, as well as efforts to build solidarity and mutual support among different segments of the plantation community.

## 12.3 Empowerment and Participation of Vulnerable Groups

Empowering vulnerable groups and ensuring their participation in decision-making processes is crucial for achieving social inclusion and equity. Individuals from Vulnerable groups often have limited opportunities to voice their concerns and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

The Government is committed to promoting the empowerment and active participation of all communities in all aspects of society.

By addressing the specific challenges faced by vulnerable groups and promoting their inclusion and empowerment, the Government aims to create a society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the nation's progress.

## CHAPTER 13

### Commemoration and Cultural Preservation

The Government of Sri Lanka recognises the importance of commemorating and preserving the history and cultural heritage of the plantation community while ensuring their full integration into the broader society. This includes acknowledging the unique identity of the Indian Origin Tamil/ Malaiyaha community and addressing the social issues that have historically marginalised them.



### 13.1 Commemoration and Identity

The Government will preserve the identity of the plantation community as IOT/ Malaiyaha Tamils and commemorates the 200th anniversary of their arrival in Sri Lanka.

This commemoration will provide an opportunity to recognise and honour the contributions of the plantation community, as well as to reflect on the challenges and injustices they have faced over the past two centuries.

The Government is committed to preserving the identity of the plantation community as IOT/ Malaiyaha Tamils, and to ensuring that their history and heritage are recognised and celebrated as an integral part of Sri Lanka's national identity. This will include initiatives such as teaching about the plantation community in the national curriculum and a National History Week to commemorate the history, struggles, and contributions of the plantation community in Sri Lanka and to highlight their cultural heritage of the community.

These initiatives will help to correct historical omissions, promote a more inclusive understanding of Sri Lanka's past and contribute to greater social cohesion and unity across the nation.

### 13.2 Cultural Preservation and Promotion

The cultural heritage of the plantation community is a vital part of Sri Lanka's national identity, and the Government is committed to preserving and promoting this heritage for future generations.

The Government will support efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of the plantation community, including their languages, traditions, arts and religious practices. This will include initiatives to document and preserve the languages, traditions, and religious practices of the community, as well as efforts to promote the visibility and representation of their culture in national cultural and historical narratives.

The Government will provide funding and support for cultural events and festivals that celebrate the heritage of the plantation community, as well as for language preservation programmes that aim to protect and promote the community's linguistic diversity. This will include initiatives to promote the use and teaching of Tamil and other languages spoken by the plantation community, as well as efforts to document and preserve oral histories, folklore, and other cultural traditions.

## CHAPTER 14

### Recognition and Declaration of Full Citizenship

**The Government of Sri Lanka affirms** its commitment to recognising and ensuring the full citizenship rights of the plantation community.

**The Government recognises** the plantation community as an integral part of Sri Lankan society and is committed to their full integration and empowerment.

**The Government recognises** the historic marginalisation of the plantation community and their exclusion from full participation in the social, economic, and political life of the country. The Government is committed to rectifying this injustice and ensuring that the plantation community is recognised and respected as full citizens of Sri Lanka, with all the rights and privileges that citizenship entails.

**The Government reaffirms** that citizenship includes the right to own land and property, the right to access quality education and healthcare, the right to participate in the national economy, and the right to be protected from exploitation and discrimination. The Government will work to ensure that these rights are fully realised and that the plantation community has the same opportunities and protections as all other citizens of Sri Lanka.

**The Government also recognises** that citizenship is not just about rights and privileges, but also about participation and belonging. The plantation community has a rich history and culture that is an integral part of Sri Lanka's national identity, and the Government is committed to ensuring that this heritage is recognised and celebrated. The Government will work to ensure that the plantation community is fully integrated into the social and cultural life of the country and that they have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the development of Sri Lanka.

**This recognition and declaration of citizenship** is a critical component of the Government's commitment to the plantation community. It is a statement of the Government's commitment to justice, equality, and inclusion. It is also in recognition of the dignity and humanity of the plantation community and a commitment to ensuring that they are treated with the respect and fairness they deserve.

**The Government commits** to ensure that this declaration is realised for the plantation community.

### Conclusion

This Charter represents a foundational document for the Government of Sri Lanka's programme and commitment to the upcountry plantation community. It sets out a comprehensive framework for addressing the community's challenges and ensuring their full participation in Sri Lankan society.

This Charter is the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the plantation community and Sri Lanka. It is a call to action for all stakeholders to come together and work towards a more just, equitable, and inclusive society. The Government is committed to leading this effort, but is cognisant that its realisation requires the active participation and support of

the plantation community, civil society organisations, the private sector, development partners and the international community. The Government calls upon all stakeholders, including development partners, civil society, and the plantation community itself, to work together in achieving this vision.

The Government reaffirms its commitment to the plantation community and to the principles of justice, equality, and inclusion that underpin this Charter. It is determined to ensure that the plantation community is fully integrated into Sri Lankan society, and that they have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the development of the country.

This Charter is a testament to that commitment and a roadmap for achieving it.

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