



Address by

Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

at the

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of the United Nations General Assembly

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Mr. President,

I congratulate you on your assumption of the high office of President of the Fifty-Ninth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations and assure you of Sri Lanka's fullest support and cooperation as you undertake the onerous responsibility of presiding over the deliberations of this august assembly. I also thank the outgoing President, Honourable Julian Hunte, for his able and efficient conduct of the Fifty Eighth Session.

Mr, President
Distinguished delegates

The International Day of Peace we celebrate today is indeed a significant event in the UN calendar. It is a Day dedicated to the creation and pursuit of a culture of peace. As I speak today in this Hall of Peace, men, women and children in my country are celebrating the Day of Peace through a wide variety of civil society events. Prayers and meditations, the resonating chimes of bells and the gentle glow of candlelight are powerful symbols of our deep collective yearning for peace.

We recognize that the pursuit of peace requires more than symbols. It requires consistent commitment, patience, perseverance and, above all, resolute action and consensus building.

Mr. President, peace and resolution of conflict through dialogue takes center stage in the world lives and hence need to be accorded the highest priority on the UN Agenda. All of us here are only too aware that peace is not the simple absence of war; it entails an active engagement to understand and address the root-causes that endanger peace and generate conflict.

In Sri Lanka, my government has implemented a series of programmes to engage the armed group, in comprehensive peace negotiations for ten years.

In Sri Lanka we faced the challenges posed by an armed group using terror and suicide bombers in its demand for a separate state. My governments have adopted the policy that all conflict has deep rooted and real causes that we must sift out from the acts of violence and terror and find means to redress them. We believe a lasting solution lies along the path of power sharing between the center and the regions where people of different communities live. We believe that this could be found only through negotiations and dialogue.

Mr. President, we abhor violence and war. We believe in life and the celebration of all that is humane and decent. We believe that the moral justification in the state and all human institutions such as the United Nations in the protection and guarantee of life. My governments have requested and received mandates from our people at numerous elections to end the conflict through negotiated settlement. We are committed to achieve peace, a peace

founded on democracy, respect for human rights, a pluralist polity and good governance.

We are fully aware that peace is not achieved easily. It is a constant struggle for mutual understanding and reconciliation, and the establishment of the rule of law, justice and equality.

The Buddha, popularly known as the Prince of Peace, has preached at length about peace and all that is required to achieve it both within each individual and between nations. I quote from the Dhammapada:

"Victory breeds hatred. The defeated live in pain. Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat."

We are deeply saddened at the violence, instability, loss of life and human suffering in Iraq. We in Sri Lanka know, and have experienced first hand, the impact of violence on society and the difficulty in finding solutions to problems of governance that satisfy all parties. Security measures alone, as pointed out recently by the Secretary-General's special representative to Iraq, will not suffice to end violence and create stability and peace. Political consensus building, reconciliation, rehabilitation and the promotion of the rule of law are essential for democracy to take root. Equally important, in today's interdependent, increasingly globalized world is the commitment of the international community to remain engaged and ensure that Iraq does not become further plagued by violence and fragmented on ethnic or religious lines.

All of us as leaders, and above all as mothers and fathers, can never forget the sheer brutality of the terrorist attack earlier this month on a school in the Russian Federation which led to the loss of so many lives of children and adults. Terrorism in all its manifestations must be condemned and fought relentlessly and globally. While no cause justifies terror unleashed upon the innocent, such outrages must make us redouble our efforts to address their root causes and seek political and socio economic explanations and solutions to them.

My Government is firmly committed to the global endeavour to fight terrorism. We have signed and ratified the UN Conventions aimed at combating this menace and we continue to contribute to the process, by chairing the Ad Hoc Committee on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism. We hope that at this session of the General Assembly, substantial progress could be made on the draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and the draft Convention on Nuclear Terrorism.

Sri Lanka believes in the UN and its potential to be the principal forum where the voice of the poor, the defenceless and the weak is also heard as much as the voice of the rich and powerful. In this regard we applaud the words of Secretary General Kofi Annan today where he made a passionate appeal for

the upholding of the rule of law without discrimination throughout the world. We congratulate him on the courageous leadership he gives to our world body. It gives us confidence and hope at this moment of human history when we question our collective ability to lead Humanity towards peace and prosperity.

We recognize therefore, the need for comprehensive reform to render the United Nations more responsive to the needs and aspirations of all of its member States. We look forward to the recommendations to be presented to this Session of the General Assembly by the 'High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change', appointed by the Secretary-General.

There is general agreement that the Security Council, as presently constituted, does not reflect the current geo-political realities. We share the concern over the lack of progress on the question of equitable regional representation and the increase in the membership of the Security Council, in both the permanent and non-permanent categories. For many years, the developing countries, have consistently urged that the composition of the Security Council be broadened to accommodate the basic principles of democratic representation. In this context, we observe that Asia, the most populous continent that is home to expanding economic powerhouses of the world is grossly under-represented in the present Council.

Mr. President, we take note that four countries – Brazil, Germany, India and Japan – will announce their participation in a compact in terms of which they will collectively support their respective candidatures for permanent status in an expanded Security Council. Sri Lanka supports their candidatures, as they comply with the objective criteria applicable to the expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council. Sri Lanka would also wish to see a consensus emerging on the permanent representation of Africa in the Security Council. Africa must be included when a final determination is reached on the future composition of the Security Council. It is hoped that the Open Ended Working Group would also continue to exert efforts to resolve all outstanding issues expeditiously.

We also propose that the General Assembly, representative of all member States of the UN should play a larger and more active role as a deliberative and decision-making body.

At the dawn of the new millennium, four years ago, we forged a consensus to pursue a vision of an inclusive globalization process that provides benefits for the widest possible segments of society. Leaving aside the commonplace clichés about globalization, we agreed on a number of goals to be implemented within specific time frames.

My government's economic and social development programmes were planned and put into action ten years ago. We have now made the necessary changes to align our plans more closely with the UN's Millennium

Development Goals. The Sri Lankan Government's strategy for development seeks a constructive partnership between a strong and accountable private sector, including foreign investment, and a robust and responsive public sector. The major thrust of our vision is to eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities, and enhance the standard of living among the different sectors of our population, thus providing equal opportunities for all.

Mr. President, on the subject of social progress, I must commend the United Nations for its continued commitment and perseverance in promoting and protecting children's rights. Apart from guaranteeing the rights of every child to education and good health services, Sri Lanka believes that children must be protected from abuse of all types, sexual, alcohol, drugs and tobacco. Children in some of our countries suffer from the ignominious practice of being used as child soldiers. In Sri Lanka we are addressing the problem of child conscription by the armed group by seeking to engage them in the process of negotiation and by supporting the activities spear headed by UNICEF and civil society organizations.

Our economic strategy is market driven but geared to achieve human development and prosperity at the grass roots level. We have crafted a policy and launched programmes to channel development efforts and resources to domestic capacity builders at the village level who are the pillars of our national economy. The majority of our population belongs to the rural sector and depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Promotion of small and medium scale enterprises is therefore vital to sustain development. Sri Lanka draws strength from the recognition the United Nations has granted for the small and medium industrialists in the developing world through the declaration of 2005 as the Year for Micro-Credit.

We witness with concern the emergence of a contrived association of certain religious beliefs with some groups of fanatics. Extremism, violence and terrorism are the complete anti-thesis of the ethical and spiritual foundation of all religious philosophies and practices. We should work resolutely to prevent these aberrations from becoming irreversible trends.

On the other hand, Mr. President, we are disturbed to witness religious symbols being defamed or abused for commercial purposes. Whether the symbols belong to the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish or any other faith, such abuse should be condemned and prohibited. The recent phenomenon of Buddhist symbols being used for commercial purposes, thus causing concern and pain of mind to Buddhists all over the world is a case in point. Fortunately, most of these organizations have agreed to refrain from such abuse in the future. Sri Lanka together with other like-minded States has brought this situation to the attention of UNESCO and other relevant inter-governmental bodies. We propose that the United Nations should call upon those responsible to pay due respect to religious symbols and practices. This would be a fitting contribution by the UN to its own initiative on a 'dialogue among civilizations.'

This year Sri Lanka will begin events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our membership of the United Nations that falls in 2005. On that occasion, we will renew our commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. We expect the Organisation to provide leadership in the task of creating a world where understanding and harmony prevails with economic, scientific and technological advancement.

My commitment, and that of my government and the people of Sri Lanka, to the United Nations remains undiminished. Our hope, Mr. President, is that all member States will cooperate fully with the United Nations to realize the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

Our noble words unless translated quickly in to palpable deeds will remain no more than a silent testimonial to our collective unwillingness or incapacity to transform lives of our peoples when they cry out for attention and redress. If all that the United Nations can do for them is to chum out periodically virtual phrases and hollow invocations to duty and responsibility, their frustration will swell and spread globally challenging peace and stability. Let that not happen. Let us leave this session of the General Assembly not only with renewed commitment to the ideals of our organization but also with renewed vigour to address our awesome responsibilities for alleviating the plight of the poor, the hungry, the disadvantaged and the oppressed.

I thank you