



# SRI LANKA

Address by

**His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa**

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

at

the Sixty-Second Session

of the

United Nations General Assembly

New York

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*(please check against delivery)*

Mr. President  
Mr. Secretary-General  
Your Excellencies  
Friends,

I am pleased to be able to address the global community on the first day of the current session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Please accept my congratulations, Mr. President, as you assume the high office of the President of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session. To H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, I convey Sri Lanka's gratitude for her astute leadership of the 61<sup>st</sup> Session.

Sri Lanka can boast of a very old and advanced civilization similar to Greek, Roman and Nile Valley civilizations. One of the important characteristics of our civilization was the use of living languages such as Sinhala and Tamil, two languages used by many even today. Therefore, I consider it my obligation to use Sinhala, a living language to address this august assembly.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me begin by quoting the immortal words of Sir Isaac Newton, "We build too many walls and not enough bridges".

We all became members of an organization that was created to let all our voices be heard, to avoid an approach to resolving problems – through violence, revenge and blame. We see a trend to find fault, to place countries in the dock and penalize those who do not fall in line. Instead of seeking solutions through cooperation, we have often created suspicion and built walls between ourselves through double standards.

Mr. President,

I am proud to inform you that despite the significant challenge posed by the ongoing conflict with a ruthless terrorist group in the North of the country, we have freed the Eastern Province from terrorism and restored law and order there. My Government has already launched a massive program of rehabilitation and reconstruction in the East. We propose to make the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka a model for development and rehabilitation, essentially with our own effort but also with the assistance of all donors. We are taking steps to return the usurped rights of the people by conducting Provincial and Local Government Elections in the East by early next year. There is a clear opportunity for the international community to play a vital role in breaking the cycle of conflict by focusing on development.

Friends,

We launched military operations only to exert pressure on the ~~terrorist~~ <sup>terrorist</sup> in order to convince them that it will not be possible for them to obtain a military victory.

Our goal remains a negotiated and honourable end to this unfortunate conflict. I must say that the All Party Representative Committee is working successfully towards it.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka was one of the first developing countries to promote universal health and education, gender equality and social mobilization. We have been able to achieve exceptional socio-economic indicators; way ahead of those normally expected of a country in the lower middle income range and on the way to achieving or surpassing many of the Millennium Development Goals. It is a beautiful sight on our rural roads to see thousands of children in clean white uniforms heading for school. It is a fine example of our success in education for all.

It is despite brutal terrorism of 25 years that we have been able to continue with this social development. My Government maintains a policy of openness and cooperation with all international human rights mechanisms and a number of high level officials have visited Sri Lanka recently.

Sri Lanka's ancient civilization was rooted in the Buddhist principles of Metta and Ahimsa - Metta being loving kindness to all living beings and Ahimsa being a deep respect for life. Human rights have been an essential part of our great cultural tradition for millennia. It is therefore nothing new for us to protect human rights. Women in pre-colonial Sri Lanka enjoyed rights that are prescribed under CEDAW - including rights of property ownership and inheritance rights. It was certainly not an accident that Sri Lanka produced the first democratically elected woman Prime Minister in the world in 1960.

Guided by the principles of Buddhism, we have long respected the rights of our fellow human beings. Therefore, it had not been necessary for us to experience global wars or the deaths of millions to learn to recognize their value. My country has no record of inflicting misery on fellow human beings for the purpose of empire building, for commercial advantage or for religious righteousness.

Sri Lanka believes, as one of the founder Members of the Human Rights Council, that human rights are too important to be used as a tool to victimize States for political advantage. It is essential that international action to facilitate compliance with human rights standards is fair and even handed. Human rights have to be protected and advanced for their own sake, not for political gain.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Even as we gather here, State sovereignty, civil society and the rule of law are increasingly being threatened by terrorism and other illegal and illicit activities in many countries. We need to be vigilant about these activities. Although the UN system has set up mechanisms to deal with

many of these problems, the capacity of the UN to address these challenges effectively has been brought into question.

There are many Member States represented in this Assembly today who have first hand experience of the havoc caused by brutish terrorism which has stretched its claws to many corners of the globe to mar innocent lives. All terrorist attacks whether in New York, Mumbai, Cairo, London or Colombo, are acts that threaten the democratic way of life and must be condemned unreservedly.

Terrorism anywhere is terrorism. There is nothing good in terrorism. Sri Lanka has taken an upfront position in the global community's efforts to deal with terrorism. We have become party to 11 of the 13 UN Conventions for the suppression of various acts of terrorism. We think that the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, which, in our view remains a priority, is only limited to endless discussion. I emphasize that we must conclude these negotiations soon.

In whatever Continent there are conflicts, those will affect the world economy. Peace in the Middle East has a great impact on our economy. Solutions sought for conflicts in various countries, must be indigenous. Otherwise, even if the international community is appeased, people in the countries saddled with conflicts will not be satisfied. This will be a blow to democracy.

At this point, we must focus our attention on the Palestinians who are striving for an independent State. The World community must help them to manage their country without any undue influence.

Friends,

We strongly support the strengthening of UN mechanisms for countering fund raising for illegal and illicit activities. We encourage the Secretary-General to allocate more resources to this area, especially to enhance technical skills in countries which do not have such skills. Many developing countries will benefit from such assistance. We need to have a better mechanism to provide solutions to the problems confronting us. Support from all Member States should be obtained for this purpose.

Friends,

The UN has a mixed record of achievements. As resources received by the UN are limited, it has been only possible to deliver limited results. We need to focus on these as they often have been characterized by countless, poorly coordinated, ineffectively designed, ineptly staffed and overlapping programs, with unnecessary inter-agency competition. The UN must always remember that its primary function is to render assistance for the well being of its Member States.

We have reached the Development Decade declared by the United Nations General Assembly. My country has declared the "Mahinda Chintana" ten year vision to usher a new Sri Lanka in line with those goals. Through that we are committed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We have accorded priority to the areas liberated from terrorism, those that have been devastated by natural disasters, and rural areas lagging behind in development. However, it is a huge challenge for us to fill the gap created by the loss of human lives arising out of disasters.

We are implementing a rural development initiative based on "Maga Neguma", the road development program, and "Gama Neguma", the rural re-awakening program and a national infrastructure development initiative. "Mahinda Chintana" ten year development vision includes continuous qualitative upgrading of education and health programmes in all areas, livelihood initiatives for low income groups, and broad social welfare programs covering poor and disadvantaged of the society, and those specially aimed at children and women. We also implement programs to protect our people from narcotic drugs and diseases transmitted through social contact.

Working population as well as low income and poor groups in developing countries such as ours face tough challenges due to escalating world oil prices, and prices of essential food items. Similarly, we are being severely affected by natural disasters, and uncertainties in the world financial markets. Therefore, it has become a challenge to achieve the Millennium Development Goals declared by this august assembly.

The World Bank established for economic development, IMF set up for financial stability, and other regional banks established along with the establishment of this world organization need to implement new programs to assist the countries that are affected by these challenges. Priority must be accorded to provide the resources for this purpose.

In these sessions, I believe that our obligation as global leaders is to commit ourselves to programs that will eradicate terrorism, establish human welfare oriented development, establish democracy and ensure there is hope for low income groups for economic development. Therefore, I appeal to the global community to make the 62<sup>nd</sup> session the beginning of a new chapter rather than just another session.

May the Triple Gem Bless You.

Thank you.