



**Remarks
by**

**H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe
President of the 68th Session of the United Nations
General Assembly**

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF VESAK

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join you in this celebration of the Day of Vesak, a day on which we observe the birth, enlightenment (nirvana) and death (parinirvana) of the Lord Buddha, a day that is a sacred day to Buddhists all around the world.

In its resolution 54/115, our General Assembly committed to observing this special day, which honors one of the most influential individuals in all of human history, Lord Buddha. I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Thailand and H.E. Mr. Norachit Sinhaseni for inviting me to share a few words with you.

As we once again commemorate the three significant events in the life of Buddha: his birth, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away, we also honor the many great contributions of one of the oldest religions in the world, which for over two and a half millennia has influenced humankind and our approach to spirituality; and for many, defines a way of life.

Vesak Day holds special significance for hundreds of millions of Buddhists. In thousands of temples across the world, in the East and West, North and South, people will celebrate the insightful messages of Buddha. While Buddhism originated in the East, the teachings – and the natural yearnings to end human suffering – are so universal that they have been assimilated by many cultures.

The message of the Buddha stands today as unaffected by time and the expansion of knowledge as when it was first enunciated. It continues to be a message of loving-kindness, unity, mindfulness, compassion, peace, tolerance and non-violence, which rings intrinsically true in our hearts and yet we find so challenging to implement in our daily lives. So many of the challenges we seek to resolve here in our Assembly of Nations – from war and conflict to environmental degradation to oppression and inequality – could benefit from the teachings the Lord Buddha shared with his followers more than two and a half thousand years ago.

Buddhism appeals to reason and freedom of thought, recognizing the inherent dignity of the human person and the human mind. It calls for equality and understanding, and its teachings and practices are equally accessible to all regardless of country, color, creed or gender. It

was a great mind of science, Albert Einstein, who said [quote]. "If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism."

As Buddhists worldwide pay homage to a prince who forsook the pleasures of a royal household to bring peace and happiness to humanity, let us look to the wisdom of the messages of Buddhism that can be applied to our own lives and the work we do. And as we set our minds to a new development agenda, let us look beyond the interests of the moment, and toward the sage and far-reaching decisions that will indeed put our planet and its people on the right path.

Thank you.
