



SRI LANKA

Address by

Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

at

the Sixtieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York
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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President
Excellencies
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and gentlemen

I extend to you Mr. President, our warmest congratulations as you assume the high office of the President of the Sixtieth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. We wish you all the best and assure you of Sri Lanka's support and cooperation in your work. To Honourable Jean Ping, I convey gratitude for his astute leadership of the Fifty-ninth Session.

Mr. President,
The 60th landmark Session of the General Assembly is doubly significant for Sri Lanka, as this year, we mark the 50th anniversary of our membership in the UN. As a small nation that has kept the flame of democracy burning through many tribulations, we take modest pride in the fact that what we said at the first General Assembly we addressed can still be recalled with undiminished relevance. Prime Minister Bandaranaike representing Sri Lanka, said on that occasion and I quote,

"This is an Organization which expresses itself most effectively by bringing to bear a certain moral force – the collective moral force and decency of human beings. That is a task in which the weak as well as the strong can render a useful service, and I give the Assembly the assurance, on behalf of my country, that as far as we are concerned, every endeavour that we can make in all sincerity to assist in the achievements of those noble ideals for which this Organization stands, will always be forthcoming in the fullest measure."

Unquote

Five decades on, I have the pleasure to say that my country has kept this promise by regularly contributing to consensus building in this Organization in areas ranging from Law of The Sea, to disarmament and from human rights to the issue of terrorism. We remain fully committed to the United Nations.

- We continue to believe that the collective moral force of this Organization is indispensable for a secure, peaceful and humane world.
- We are convinced that such a world could be realized through the honest commitment of every one of the member States to their individual and collective responsibilities.
- Our peoples live in the hope and expectation that we shall deliver.

Mr. President,

Distinguished delegates,

On the morning of the 26th of December 2004, Sri Lanka and several other countries around the Indian Ocean region woke up to a natural disaster of unprecedented magnitude. Towering Tsunami waves struck two thirds of the coastal areas of our island nation leaving in its wake, death and destruction of a scale hitherto unknown by the world. Moved by the enormity of this calamity, Governments, the UN and other International organisations, civil society organisations and countless well-wishers across the world rushed to help my country and its people to recover, rehabilitate and re-build. Mr. President, it was a magnificent gesture of human solidarity. Citizens of the world reached out beyond the confines of geo –political and other man made barriers in one magnificent gesture of human generosity.

It rekindled in us, new confidence in the power of peoples, acting in unison across the globe to move governments to act in the best interests of humankind, for a new and better world.

To all those who assisted and sympathised with us, and contributed generously, to rebuild our country, on behalf of my people and my government, I wish to convey my profound appreciation and gratitude.

Let me take this opportunity to extend a special word of thanks to President Clinton, the UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, for his commitment and leadership at coordinating the ongoing international effort for sustainable recovery.

Mr. President,

Just as my country was in national distress in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster, we are now in distress in the face of an ominous renewal of terror on our soil. One month ago, my dear colleague Lakshman Kadirgamar, the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka was assassinated by a calculated and barbaric act of terrorism. One more hero who fought relentlessly for freedom and justice has been felled by the enemies of peace and unity. As Foreign Minister the late Mr. Kadirgamar argued powerfully and worked tirelessly against extremist racist ideologies that employ violence to gain their divisive objectives. He was bold enough to expose to the world the true face of terrorism inflicted upon my country. For eleven long years Mr. Kadirgamar, from this very podium warned this Assembly about the threat posed by terrorism to the democratic way of life, not only in Sri Lanka, but across the globe.

Mr. President,

For over two decades, Sri Lanka has been under sustained assault by the LTTE, an armed group which employs brutal methods and suicide bombings in their campaign of terror to obtain a separate State. Disregarding the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, this group continues to engage in numerous illegal and terrorist activities. These include the conscription of children as soldiers, callously disregarding promises given to many, including the UN Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, and the assassination of democratic opponents, as part of their policy of eliminating Tamil political leaders and Human Rights activists with disdain for all international law and practice, despite sustained efforts by my Government and the Norwegian facilitators.

I tend to doubt that the Security Council's recent identification of this group on account of child conscription would suffice to deter such activities. Targeted sanctions such as those proposed by Secretary General, Annan, in his report to the United Nations Security Council should be imposed on those armed groups who undermine national and international peace and violate human rights.

I firmly believe that terrorism cannot be eliminated through military suppression by the State machinery. The socio economic and cultural roots of a conflict must be sought and effectively redressed. We recognize that a lasting solution to the ethnic issues and

terrorism in Sri Lanka or anywhere else, can only be found through negotiations and dialogue. Accordingly, my Government was the first in 1994 to offer a negotiated settlement in place of an armed conflict, and an extensive devolution of power instead of a separate State. In February 2002, the Government entered into a Ceasefire Agreement with the LTTE and began talks with the facilitation of the Government of Norway. However, two and a half years ago the LTTE walked away from the peace talks for the sixth time in 18 years. All efforts to have the talks renewed have so far failed. As a measure of goodwill, after the tsunami disaster struck Sri Lanka, I agreed to an arrangement with the LTTE for joint action in tsunami reconstruction work. This was yet another measure in a long series of efforts to engage and work with the LTTE, particularly in humanitarian ventures, despite their obdurate insistence to remain armed, and remain un-contested by any other democratic, Tamil political party. My Government has reaffirmed its commitment to the Ceasefire and peace talks. We continue to do all that is required by a democratic Government to ensure that we do not return to armed conflict, fulfilling the wishes of all our people.

A peace process, Mr. President, cannot, and does not operate in a vacuum. People demand that a process of peace should include commitment and good conduct of all parties to a conflict.

When a belligerent group, a non-state actor, exploits its unique position that accrues from a peace process to utilise freedom guaranteed under a democratic system of governance to strengthen itself through infiltration, and coercion of civilians, organizations, and political parties, this impinges seriously on the ability of an elected Government to move forward effectively in their efforts at reconciliation and peace.

The restoration of democracy, the creation of space for dissent and promotion of human rights in the affected areas of the North and the East of the country is now an essential requisite for a successful and meaningful peace process in Sri Lanka. A lasting political solution can come to fruition only when the rebel group becomes a democratic civilian organisation. This deserves the fullest support of the international community.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka, as we have been for long years, remains firmly committed to the global endeavour to fight terrorism in all its aspects. No cause justifies terror to be unleashed indiscriminately upon the innocent. Sri Lanka has accordingly signed and ratified all UN Conventions aimed at combating terrorism. We earnestly hope that at this session, it would be possible to conclude work on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism to complete and strengthen the international, legal framework to combat terrorism through collective measures. Sri Lanka will continue to provide its contribution to facilitate a consensus in its capacity as the Chair of the UN Ad Hoc Committee on this subject.

Mr. President, Sri Lanka, has pledged to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015. We have already achieved the targeted goals in primary education, infant and maternal mortality. We are committed to further promoting the political and economic empowerment of women so that gender equality becomes a matter of human rights and social justice.

Our National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) implements many programmes to eliminate abuse and violence against children and ensure their protection as well as their rights to enjoy freely, life's most precious gift — childhood. Our success is due to the outcome of sustained efforts at policy planning and implementing.

These benchmarks and other indicators manifesting high physical quality of life enjoyed by our people will be further elevated as we strive to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. However, poverty remains a major challenge. To eradicate this scourge, we are now taking further steps through the adoption of economic and social programmes in cooperation with our bilateral and multilateral development partners.

Mr. President,

If we now look at the world situation, although smallpox has been eradicated and polio is on the verge of being eliminated, there are other diseases, often associated with poverty, which continue to take a heavy human toll especially in developing countries. Every year, six million children die from malnutrition before their 5th birthday. More than 50% of

people in Africa suffer from water-related diseases such as cholera. HIV/AIDS kills 6000 people every day. Each year, over 300 million people are infected with malaria. New challenges like **SARS** and Avian Flu indicate that national borders offer little protection against these proliferating pandemics. In the face of unparalleled advancement, both in technology and human mobility, it is unconscionable to let some in our Nations suffer from diseases that can be controlled, if not eradicated.

Mr. President,

In my view, there are three evils that plague our world today that can have no place in this modern globalizing era of the 21st Century. They are poverty, disease and terrorism. Today, these evils affect the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of a majority of humankind. No country can deal with these threats by themselves. International cooperation is in our self-interest and must be mustered.

We share the strong belief that the UN at its 60th anniversary should seriously undertake comprehensive reforms, in order that the Organisation is fully equipped to meet new challenges taking into account the current global realities.

We acknowledge with appreciation, the valuable contribution made by the Secretary General and his team to this ongoing reform process. This enabled the adoption of the Outcome Document, at the just concluded High Level Summit of the UN. We urge all Member States to work together to build on this framework in order to operationalise what has been agreed and to work further on what remains to be achieved.

Mr. President,

Recovery after the tsunami disaster taught us the value and potential of humanity acting in unison when fellow humans are in distress. We now hope that the same human spirit and common interests will continue to prevail in addressing the socio-economic and security challenges we face. Let us resolve to commit ourselves collectively on this solemn occasion of the 60th Anniversary of our Organization to act together in the interest of humankind in order that we strive to eliminate the three scourges of poverty, disease and terrorism.