



SRI LANKA

Address by

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

at the

Sixty-Third Session

of the

United Nations General Assembly

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Mr. President,
Secretary General of the United Nations
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka congratulates you Mr. President on your election to this high office. We are confident that your guidance will enable the General Assembly to make progress on the important issues confronting humanity and making the work and role of the United Nations more relevant to the lives of billions of people.

While my mother tongue is Sinhala, let me elaborate a few thoughts in Tamil. Sinhala and Tamil are the two languages of the people of Sri Lanka. Both these have been used through the centuries, are rich in literature, and are widely used in my country, with recognition as Official Languages.

With the widening of democracy in our country, the bonds between the Sinhala and Tamil people of Sri Lanka will grow stronger and remain a major force for its future development. We will march towards a richer freedom and lasting unity that await us as a nation.

Mr. President,

The theme for our debate, "The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world, as well as the need to democratize the United Nations" is indeed far sighted. It focuses on one of the critical survival needs of humanity as well as one of the key institutional needs of the world body.

The global food crisis has become a frightening actuality and has the potential to assume even more dangerous proportions if we fail to take urgent and collective action. Similarly, a less democratic United Nations runs the risk of being less effective and less credible while raising major concerns about its legitimacy.

Through a series of projects with regional impact, Sri Lanka will contribute to the goal of increasing food production, investing more in agriculture and research, and sharing technologies and best practices. This is an integral part of rural empowerment so essential in the developing world, as the vast majority of our people are rural based and depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

Achieving food security would require strengthening and revitalizing the agriculture sector. This calls for the empowerment of small and medium scale farmers through a series of measures. These represent vital collective steps by all of us in the UN system. Sri Lanka sees self-sufficiency as the answer to overcoming the food crisis and giving strength to nations. No longer can we expect farmers in developing countries to be mainly producers for export markets. In this context, implementation of effective social safety nets remains a priority as reassurance and empowerment. This is why we have introduced measures of social security such as the fertilizer and fisheries subsidies. The advice given by some powerful countries and powerful institutions are contrary to this. Yet, it is necessary that we pay no heed to such advice, and determine to do what is best for the innocent people of our countries.

Mr. President,

As the current Chair of SAARC, I have the honour to state that at the recent Summit, we affirmed our resolve as a region to make our own contribution to grapple with the food crisis and to make our Region revive its historic critical role in food production, by once again becoming a major granary of the world.

We also decided on the immediate establishment and operationalisation of the SAARC Food Bank. This mechanism, we believe, will help considerably to ensure both food and nutritional security of the people of South Asia. This initiative will contribute to the larger global efforts that we launched in Rome, in June this year, for averting and mitigating the impact of the food crisis.

Mr. President,

We also must find solutions to the energy crisis that are both equitable and pragmatic. Energy supplies must be diversified by developing advanced, cleaner, more efficient and cost-effective technologies, for both fossil fuels and renewable energy sources. We need to engage in energy conservation and accept the reality of dependence on fossil fuels for much longer.

Equally obvious is the imperative of transferring new technology to the developing countries. We in our own region will use increasing resources of human and scientific talent to produce our own technologies, making the best use of the natural resources, the sun, wind and ocean that we have in abundance, free of the restrictions of the marketplace. Demands of humanity cannot anymore be allowed to be at the mercy of speculative or captive markets.

To this end, Sri Lanka's own view is that the United Nations and its agencies must take the leadership in developing a framework for international cooperation so that the vulnerable developing countries have access to the energy benefits of the so-called 'nuclear renaissance', at reasonable and affordable rates. This cooperative endeavour will impact positively in such diverse areas as energy, MDGs, climate change and even arms control.

We urge caution in the rush to use bio-fuels to break our dependence of fossil fuels. It is already seen that the rush to bio-fuels has contributed to high food prices. Sri Lanka's policy is that any arable land should not be diverted or directed towards the production of bio-fuels, however profitable it may be in the short-term. It was propitious that Sri Lanka acted with courage and foresight, without being cowed by many pressures, through the last three years, and thus did not face any situation where our people had to face hunger or starvation.

On climate change, the SAARC leaders reiterated the need to redouble efforts within an expanded regional framework for environmental protection, conservation and justice. We stressed that we should contribute to restoring harmony with nature, a part of the heritage of South Asia. We humans have interfered with nature, too much for too long. We must accept that the dangers of Climate Change are manmade, and its solutions too require man's intervention.

Mr. President,

With the promulgation of the UN Charter to save succeeding generations from the tragedy of war, at least the major threat of intercontinental war seems to have receded. However, the just struggle of the Palestinians for statehood continue. Today, the United Nations and its people are confronted with the fast spreading menace of terrorism that manifests itself in various forms in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The United Nations has a grave responsibility to save today's and succeeding generations, from this new and continuing menace. We have been talking for long enough. It is time for clear action in this regard.

Like many other countries, Sri Lanka too has not been spared this global menace. Exploiting perceived ethnic grievances, that must and can be addressed through political means, the vested interests of a well organized terror group, the LTTE indulges in blatant and brutal acts of terrorism, including suicide bombings to seek negotiating leverage, political recognition and legitimacy. I am saddened by the loss of life and destruction caused by the recent terrorist attack in Pakistan

Mr. President,

Our Government has always been ready to address the causes of these issues and effectively implement political and constitutional solutions to meet the aspirations and rights of all communities. What the Government **would not, and could not do** is to let an illegal and armed terrorist group, the LTTE, to hold a fraction of our population, a part of the Tamil community, hostage to such terror in the northern part of Sri Lanka and deny those people their democratic rights of dissent and free elections. Through our past actions, we have proved it.

The Government has therefore declared its policy of engaging in dialogue and discussion with the democratic leadership of the Tamil community, a people who have lived in harmony with other Sri Lankans for centuries. Today, there are Tamil leaders holding responsible ministerial posts in my government. A former Attorney General of then Ceylon, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, also a loved Tamil politician, in September 1904, had this to say at a public meeting in Colombo. (I quote) "I have been to many countries in the world. But, no where have I seen such a friendly race as the Sinhalese who also uphold high moral values." (unquote). Such was the harmony between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. But a malicious group has turned all of this upside down.

All successive governments of Sri Lanka have endeavoured to resolve the problem for over twenty five years, including through Norwegian facilitation and international Co-Chairs overseeing a so-called peace process that was treated with contempt by the terrorists. On each occasion that talks were held seeking peace, the terrorists of the LTTE walked out on the flimsiest of excuses and reverted to terrorism of the worst kind, indiscriminately targeting innocent civilians.

Our Government would only be ready to talk to this illegal armed group when it is ready to commit itself to decommissioning of its illicit weapons and dismantling of its military capability, and return to the democratic fold. The Government has also made it clear that the elected Government cannot and will not permit undermining of the territorial integrity of the sovereign UN Member State of Sri Lanka and the division of its territory. We are clear in this message.

The Government's objective is to enable the people to enjoy the benefits of the democratic processes and to speed the development activities in those areas where there is a heavy presence of terrorists. This would be similar to the fast tracking of economic development taking place in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, where former terrorists now function as democratically elected Provincial Councilors, and a former child soldier conscripted by the LTTE is now the elected Chief Minister, having abandoned terrorism and embracing democracy. Significantly, the restoration of democracy in the East of Sri Lanka was achieved in less than one year of it being freed from the clutches of terror.

Our Government has also sought and received the cooperation of the United Nations, ICRC and other agencies to help us in providing humanitarian assistance to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and other affected civilians. The UN Secretary General's special representative on IDP's who visited Sri Lanka some years ago said and I quote: "Sri Lanka represents the unusual situation of a central government providing relief aid to persons under the control of (the) main opposition group. In a world replete with examples of Governments and rebel groups using food as a weapon against civilian populations, the situation in Sri Lanka is one that deserves closer attention if not more publicity as an important precedent. (Unquote)

The Government of Sri Lanka continues this humanitarian policy even today although we know that the terrorists seize a good proportion of these humanitarian supplies. Our supplies are not confined to food; they extend to medicines, and all other essentials as well as schools and hospitals, with teachers, doctors, nurses, and all other essential staff. This is not all, the government also purchases the paddy and other foodstuffs produced in those areas. I do not think there is any country in the world where there is a government that provides such humanitarian assistance to terrorists that attack it. Our government considers the supply of humanitarian relief to its people as its prime responsibility.

The complex situation in Sri Lanka needs to be addressed and resolved through an appropriate process of deterrent law and order action and patient political efforts of consensus building. We have achieved the difficult but essential task of building democracy in the Eastern Province and are confident that it can be done in the North as well.

Mr. President,

This session of the Assembly is a good time to take stock of progress made towards MDGs around the globe. As we do so, it is regrettable to note that most are behind schedule. The slowing down of global economic growth, financial turmoil and speculation, rising food and fuel prices and the impacts of climate change are clear and present obstacles. Also, based on their political role, sanctions imposed on the leaders, and the leadership of some countries following some protests, are in fact targeted at the innocent people of those countries.

The steadily growing menace of international terrorism, with related activities such as smuggling of illegal arms, human trafficking, drug trafficking, money laundering, and business empires run by terror groups undoubtedly undermine the fundamentals of humanity and civilization. It appears that steps taken by us to eradicate these illegal activities have not been effective. This further complicates all national and international efforts at moving towards realizing MDGs. Terrorism, as I have emphasized many a time, by its very nature, rolls back even our modest achievements.

Mr. President,

Another similar menace is threatening to devour our children, the most valuable asset of any nation. That is the insecurity of the cyber space that has not only helped corrupt the minds of our children but also exposes them to predators such as paedophiles, drug dealers and pornographic sites. Sri Lanka has banned pornographic and similar destructive sites from being available through ISP providers. We are also controlling and restricting the use of mobile telephones for such damaging activities. This is an important area for world leaders to focus on.

It is important that urgent and collective actions, both short and long term, are taken to stem these adverse trends. Only such determined and concerted actions will enable progress towards the realization of the agreed development goals, including the MDGs and frustrate elements which are bent on reversing the gains made. We must deeply commit ourselves as members of the United Nations towards forging a way forward from the limitations not seen by those who laid the foundations for this great institution of humankind. If we fail to do it now, future generations will curse us.

Mr. President, I wish to conclude my address with a stanza from the Dhammapada, words from the Enlightened One.

Victory breeds hatred
The defeated live in pain,
Happily the calmed live,
Having set victory and defeat aside

May the Noble Triple Gem bless you.
