

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.

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

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