

**Opening Remarks by H.E. Dr. Rohan Perera, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka, on the occasion of the Day of Vesak 2018**

The Most Venerable Members of the Maha Sangha

H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly

H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations

Distinguished Co-Chair H.E. Mr. Vitavas Srivihok, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies & gentlemen,

It is a great honour and a privilege for me to extend a warm welcome to you and to address you on this very solemn occasion as we observe Vesak in the United Nations. We are all aware of its significance, as it commemorates the birth, the enlightenment and the *mahaparinirwana* of Lord Buddha.

As we gather here today, in this historic General Assembly hall of the United Nations, it is an apt occasion to reflect on the true significance and the continuing relevance of the message of the Buddha, in addressing the contemporary problems that affect the world we live in today.

The grim reality is that, despite our best efforts, we are confronted with unprecedented challenges in the global order. The world continues to be plagued by violent conflicts, poverty, hunger and disease. These are troubled times in which humanity is confronted by mutual distrust, hatred and increasing isolationism. Rising international tensions and the spectre of terrorism and violent extremism spreading across national frontiers, are threatening to tear apart the very fabric of human security and jeopardize our collective quest for peace.

In finding answers to these phenomena one must examine deeply the root causes of such violent conflicts and rising tensions. According to the Buddha's teachings, the root cause for violence, unhappiness and suffering is caused by "wrong views" born out of greed, hatred and delusion, within undisciplined and untrained minds. Such thoughts are permeating not only the present global order but also within States themselves, extracting a heavy toll in terms of human suffering, with catastrophic consequences for humanity.

In the Anguttara Nikaya (Chap 1, Verse 27), the Buddha states that there is no single factor so responsible for suffering as the wrong view of the undisciplined mind.

***"I don't envision a single thing that, when undeveloped & uncultivated, leads to such great harm as the mind. The mind, when undeveloped & uncultivated leads to great harm."***

Accordingly, in order to confront the violence in society and the world around us, we must first tame the “wrong views” within ourselves and adopt “Samma Ditti” or the right views. It is these “right views” that lead to ‘right deeds’, as our inner peace is reflected in our actions. As our inner and outer worlds remain interconnected, by healing oneself, we can heal society and create a global community of peace.

Let me quote from the Preamble of the Constitution of UNESCO, which states:

***“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.***

Disarmament of the mind, therefore, remains key to world peace. It is also apt to recall in this context, the words of advice Buddha had given to the Lichchhavis, a ruling class during his time. To them he emphasized as the core of governance, the need to meet in harmony, discuss in harmony and rise in harmony” – one of the earliest recorded illustrations of the idea of consensus building and democratic governance being conceptualized. It needs no emphasis that these are the same principles we are attempting to adhere today within the United Nations – Principles of Justice, Rule of Law, Good Governance for the greater good of all humanity.

Venerable Maha Sangha,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Buddha’s message to the world was to create a society that embodies peace and harmony, justice and equality. It is a message that resonates even today, as it did 2,500 years ago. And on this Vesak Day, may the “right view” guide us to create a just, free and peaceful world for all beings.

Theruvan Saranai!  
May the Triple Gem Bless you!