

English Translation

**Address by H.E. Maithripala Sirisena
President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

**General Debate of the Seventy-Second Session
of the United Nations General Assembly**

**19 September 2017
United Nations, New York**

A very good evening to all of you!

His Excellency the President of the General Assembly

Excellencies

His Excellency the Secretary General of the United Nations

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be able to commence my address to the 72nd Session of the General Assembly while congratulating the newly appointed President and Secretary-General of the Organisation. In fact, it gives me great pleasure to address this august Assembly for the third time as the Head of State of Sri Lanka.

The theme of this 72nd Session of the General Assembly is 'Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet'.

Today, when we take into consideration the prevailing conditions in the world, this theme is extremely timely.

I was elected President in January 2015. Before being elected, there were a number of promises and pledges that I gave to the beloved people of my country. What I particularly mentioned at the time was that, since the Executive Presidency in Sri Lanka had been vested with more power than that which has

been vested in any leader in any other democratic system in the world, once I am elected, I would remove those excessive powers from the Presidency and entrust those powers to the Parliament.

Once I was elected to the Presidency, I have taken steps, while holding office and while enjoying the right to exercise those powers, to in fact shed those powers and transfer those powers to the Parliament. I have thus set an example both to national politics in my country and to international politics, as a leader who has shed power while holding office.

As countries that promote, protect and nurture democracy, it is very important that leaders who are elected to office in democracies take steps to strengthen and protect democracy, exercise power with great responsibility, and use one's authority to build a righteous society.

However, when one observes recent history in the past few decades, one witnesses situations where the reluctance of leaders to leave office has led to the breakdown of peace within those countries, even resulting in the breakdown of peace and the creation of division, disunity and discord between countries in the international arena as well. We have the benefit of several such examples from history.

I must inform this Assembly, that, in my country, we have succeeded in consolidating democracy, and removing from office political groups that wielded extreme, excessive power and autocratic governance. During the last two-and-a-half years, we have succeeded in our journey of re-establishing and restoring the freedom of the people, protecting human rights and nurturing fundamental rights.

In the development journey of our nation, this year, 2017, was named as the 'Year for Alleviation of Poverty'. Just like my country, the entire global community is today engaged in efforts to eradicate poverty. Having named 2017 as the year for freedom from poverty, we initiated and launched development projects in Sri Lanka this year to strengthen the domestic economy. As all of you in the international community are well aware, the conflict that prevailed in Sri Lanka for 30 years affected our economy adversely and resulted in the weakening of our economy. We succeeded in defeating the separatist terrorist movement within our country and in initiating peace, establishing democracy and taking our country forward as a peaceful and free nation. For this purpose, drawing from lessons learned from the conflict and economic disadvantages of conflict, we turned a new page, towards a forward looking journey to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and strengthening the domestic economy including local agriculture and industries.

In working towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, my government has accorded priority to conservation of the environment. I must make special mention of the fact that today, just as my own country, the entire world, including the United States of America, is facing difficulties and challenges as a result of climate change. In this context, it is essential that the international Agreement that we reached in Paris, and the unity that we achieved internationally by signing and ratifying the Agreement is carried forward through its implementation. This is an important goal that is before the world community today, that I must emphasise. It is vital that we bear in mind the importance of implementation of the Paris Agreement in the interest of humankind as well as the eco-systems and all living beings on this planet.

Under the national programme for alleviation of poverty, my government commenced a special programme named "Grama Shakthi" ("Strengthening the Villages").

Similarly, we have launched a clear economic policy and plan up to the year 2025 named 'Vision 2025'. Aimed at strengthening the local economy, local agriculture, and alleviation of poverty, it is our fervent hope that the economic development programme 'Vision 2025' will enrich our country, infusing it with new energy and prosperity.

Mr. President,

I must make special mention of the fact that both in my country and in countries all over the world, children are today faced with several problems and challenges. In my country, in order to protect children, we have initiated a broad national programme under the theme of "Protecting Children". Protecting children from drugs and various forms of abuse is important, and must receive our special attention at national and international level. It is critical that such programmes are drawn up with clear targets for implementation at both national and international level.

The world is seized of the need for protection and promotion of Women's Rights. Achieving gender parity is still a challenge in most countries and in most societies. Discrimination against women still remains a problem in most societies, that must be addressed. In my country, over 52% of the population are women. Women's Rights are guaranteed through amendments to our Constitution. Similarly, my Government has included in the new Constitutional amendments, provision to ensure that 25% of the list of candidates at elections should comprise of women.

Protection of children, protection of women's rights, and steps to combat drug abuse are programmes that we have started at national level. Similarly, it is important that the United Nations too pays attention to the need for an international, world-wide programme to eradicate illegal drugs and deal with the challenges of drug abuse. This is important in the interest of the entirety of humankind. Accordingly, all countries and all societies, from school children onwards should be made conscious of the need to combat and eradicate the scourge of drug abuse that poses a significant challenge to all of humanity. It is necessary to explore the possibility of reaching an international Plan of Action through consensus, towards this end.

When I was elected to office in 2015 after the end of a nearly three-decade long conflict, there were two main problems or challenges that we had to face. One of the main problems was the severe debt burden. The other problem was the issue that the previous government had faced in dealing with the implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions pertaining to allegations of violations of human rights during the conflict.

Through the programme that we have launched to strengthen the domestic economy, we have taken steps to establish target oriented measures for reducing the debt burden, including through attracting foreign investment. Similarly, my Government is committed to taking steps, as a priority, to find solutions to the matters of concern that have received the attention of the Human Rights Council. While we have taken steps towards consolidating democracy and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms during the last two-and-a-half years and successfully established a democratic society, we will continue to work in the future towards the further strengthening of these important attributes.

I must especially emphasise that my Government is firmly committed to strengthen national reconciliation, and ensure that all the people living in my country, speaking different languages, and of different religions are able to live in unity, without fear, suspicion, hatred and anger. We are determined

to build a society where everyone is able to live with freedom and dignity as equal citizens. My Government is committed to achieve these ends in a holistic manner through the strengthening of the domestic economy and the creation of prosperity and taking steps to create a disciplined and righteous society. Consolidating the Rule of Law and righteousness are priorities to which my Government remains firmly committed.

Mr. President,

I must emphasise that, at this important time in my country's journey, when we are taking progressive measures to strengthen democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we are moving forward forging friendships and closer engagement with the international community, we look forward to receive greater support from the United Nations Organisation for my Government to be able to succeed in our nation-building endeavour.

Sri Lanka has been a member of the United Nations for almost 62 years. I must stress that Sri Lanka, as a member of the UN, is firmly committed to abiding by its Charter, and the Conventions and Rules and Regulations and decisions of the United Nations at all times.

Accordingly, we seek the respectful support of all, as we take steps in a progressive manner, to address allegations and implement resolutions, while protecting the independence and sovereignty of my country. Some expect quick action and short-sighted, short-term solutions. As a country which has suffered an almost 30-year-long conflict, I urge the respectful support of all, in ensuring the success of the journey we have embarked upon to unite the people who were torn by division in my country, to build feelings of unity and compassion, to dispel fear, suspicion, anger and hatred and take forward the beloved people of my country and strengthen and rebuild my beloved motherland as a strong and prosperous democracy. Our path forward must be stable and progressive and not one of haste that may be destabilizing, considering the complex and sensitive nature of issues that we face.

I once again urge the United Nations and the international community to support and assist the journey that we have undertaken to ensure non-recurrence of conflict in my country, to forge unity and friendship among all communities in my country, to take my country forward as a nation that is reconciled and all citizens of all communities, speaking different languages, of different religions, are united and bound by feelings of humanity. I seek your support for the development efforts we have undertaken that are essential for the reconciliation efforts to succeed and ensure non-recurrence of conflict and our vision of a nation that is righteous, prosperous and democratic, to succeed, as an example to other countries that are also recovering from conflict.

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary General,

I conclude my remarks, wishing you the very best and assuring you of Sri Lanka's cooperation.

Thank you.

May the Triple Gem Bless You.