

English Translation

**Impromptu Address
by
His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena
President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

**General Debate of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly
New York, 21 September 2016**

Good Evening

Blessings of the Triple Gem to all of you

Ayubovan

Vanakkam

As-salamu alaykum

It is an extremely happy occasion for me to participate in this 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, as the President of Sri Lanka.

During the past twenty months or so, we have ushered in a new era of transformation in Sri Lanka, and given priority to laying the foundation for the necessary political and economic reforms.

In particular, we have managed to end the state of fear and doubt that prevailed in Sri Lankan society before my Government came into office, and we have laid the foundation and strengthened the requirements necessary for people living in a democratic society to live with happiness and in freedom, without fear.

The objective of my Government is to make Sri Lanka one of the happiest nations in the world for all the people in my country. Therefore, in consolidating freedom and democracy and achieving economic prosperity, our objective and aspiration is to make the people of Sri Lanka rank among the strongest and most erudite and enlightened in the world.

Poverty is presently a serious challenge throughout the world, including Sri Lanka. Next year, 2017, has been declared as the year of freedom from poverty in my country. We have prioritized economic development, and given prominence to putting in place the necessary requirements for addressing all the problems faced by the people of my country.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When working with the United Nations and other organizations as well as other nations, and when working on addressing the requirements of the people of our country, we are committed to always give priority to sustainable development. It is within this framework that we have given prominence to

securing the necessary economic benefits for our people. Therefore, we will be mindful to protect our environment, and work within the Agreement reached at the Paris Climate Change Conference as advocated by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in making the required transformations in all the necessary fields in our country.

On behalf of the educated young generation in our country, I commit to work towards making Sri Lankan society recognize and give importance to the formulation of new policies aimed at achieving national development and a new production economy, based on knowledge-based economic development, and a green economy.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends,

As an island nation endowed with ocean resources, the new government hopes giving priority to utilizing ocean resources for implementing a programme of action for development of tourism, fisheries industries and marine research. While advancing free healthcare and free education, we intend to infuse new knowledge into these streams for the development of agriculture and local industries. And, through these steps and the development of local industries, we seek to provide better facilities and improved living standards for the people of our country.

Mr. President,

We see a disturbing phenomenon in today's world, internationally, in most countries. Societies are afflicted with war and war-like situations, violent extremism, division and hatred. In situations like this, the fundamentals of civilized society and humanity face serious threat. In this context, I believe that every country must today give importance and priority to addressing these problems that have arisen in our societies and work towards developing a society that respects humanity. As a Buddhist country, the values and philosophy in the teachings of Theravada Buddhism too, we believe, can provide important and useful insight in the quest to seek solutions to many of the problems the world faces today. Similarly, I see this present era in the world as one in which the teachings of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other religions and philosophies are important for creating greater understanding. For this, the cooperation of all countries is essential.

In the process of bringing about these changes, there is a serious threat faced by most countries in the world including Sri Lanka to which I would like to draw the attention of the respected General Assembly of the United Nations. This is the problem of drugs that poses a serious threat to human society itself, preying on school-going children and causing much destruction to communities. When this Session of the General Assembly began yesterday, the President of Brazil who made the inaugural address explained in detail, the serious nature of this threat to our societies and communities. While adding my voice to the appeal made by the President of Brazil, I urge the General Assembly of the United Nations to look at developing a strong international framework that is more effective than existing measures that are in place, to eradicate the drug menace that has afflicted our societies and threaten the younger generation, especially children in schools. Such a programme must include plans and efforts to combat this menace at national level in all countries, and at international level.

I assure this Assembly that we have taken several important steps in our country that are necessary for consolidating democracy, freedom, good governance, and the rule of law. I am happy to state that through such transformative steps, we have laid the foundation necessary to forge national reconciliation, and ensure non-recurrence of conflict in our country – my country. As a country that has suffered violent

conflict for 30 years, we are drawing from experience and lessons learned to strengthen national reconciliation, and we are determined to prevent the recurrence of conflict in my country, Sri Lanka. We have given priority in this context to consolidate freedom and democracy in our country, and through a strong foundation of national reconciliation forged through unity and friendship among communities, we want to make Sri Lanka an erudite and enlightened nation. For this purpose, I respectfully seek the cooperation of all countries and international organizations.

In the introduction of political reform and transformation, and in strengthening the national reconciliation process, we will always give prominence to, and respect for local and indigenous philosophy, and the needs and requirements of our people, while protecting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. This is in line with the importance of recognizing the requirements of the people of my country, specific to Sri Lanka, similar to the need for all the other countries in the world to have such processes in line with local thinking and the specific character of the people in those respective countries. In our journey of carrying out social and political reform in line with the requirements of our people, we seek to do so with international assistance and cooperation, and in line with internationally recognized practice to build an enlightened society in my country.

After being entangled in violent conflict for almost 30 years, I seek the cooperation and blessings of the entire international community, to proceed on this journey of strengthening national reconciliation and political reform with wisdom, in an intelligent and prudent manner, with patience and dignity, to accomplish the goals that my treasured Sri Lankan nation, my motherland, seeks.

I value greatly, the cooperation extended to Sri Lanka at all times by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and his officials. During his years in office as Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon rendered an invaluable service to all people. He helped us strengthen reconciliation. Internationally, he helped carry out development requirements necessary for all, for the entire world community, and I value his service greatly.

In conclusion, I emphasize the commitment of my Government, at all times, to carry out our responsibilities towards making my country, the Sri Lankan nation, one of the most enlightened nations of the world. For this purpose, we will carry out programmes that empower our youth and our new generations by providing them the necessary knowledge that they require to succeed. In carrying out all these tasks, I ensure that we will act responsibly at all times by building a democratic and free society that can be an example to others, and carry out our responsibilities and obligations towards our people. I end my remarks by respectfully seeking your cooperation and blessings necessary to succeed in this important journey that we have undertaken.

Thank you.

May the Triple Gem bless you!