

Speech delivered by President Maithripala Sirisena at the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly

I am extremely happy to take part in this 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I wish to bring to the notice of Your Excellencies the current situation in my country. For the last twenty months, I have given the leadership to usher a new era of social, political and economic transformations in my country.

Before I came to power, people in my country were living in fear and suspicion. I could end that period and lay the foundation for strengthening rule of law and restoring democratic rights for the people of Sri Lanka to live happily in a free and democratic society.

My government's intention is to make the people of Sri Lanka one of the happiest among the world communities. For that purpose, the government is committed to strengthening freedom and democracy, while achieving economic prosperity. The government is committed to make the people of Sri Lanka a developed nation.

Poverty is a global challenge. I am determined to alleviate poverty in my country. I declared 2017 as the Year of 'Alleviation of Poverty' in Sri Lanka. I have given lead to creating the basic platform for the people to free themselves poverty in a county that prioritizes economic progress.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Sustainable Development Agenda is upheld as the guiding principles for all nations and institutions lead by United Nations in bringing about economic, social and environmental transformations to make a world a better place. In that, we have identified that economic development plays a key role, while environmental sustainability, specially the Paris Agreement, which, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon initiated, will remain a main pillar in our endeavor to bring about the necessary changes in the country.

With the educated younger generations in mind, that national development strategy of Sri Lanka will give prominence to build a 'green' and an innovation-based economy through progressive reforms and planning.

As an Island-Nation, Sri Lanka wishes to make maximum use of the ocean with new light on ocean research, tourism, fisheries and marine resources. The government wants to further improve the free healthcare system and the free education system while bringing in more technology into agriculture and domestic industries in order to ensure that our people live better lives.

In many parts of the world, we see the unfortunate proliferation of anger, hatred, and brutality. I would call that the contemporary society is experiencing a crisis of morality. I believe that all states should pay heed to the cry for moral values. I believe that every society must dedicate itself to raise its share of positive moral values.

Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country, where *Theravada* Buddhism is practiced. The teachings of the Buddha help us find solutions to many of the burning issues of the contemporary world. Similarly, I am sure the wisdom offered by the great world religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and others can help us today. As such, I am of the view that we, as states, can strengthen and foster those religions and philosophies that help us look inward.

I take this opportunity to draw the attention of this apex audience to a great obstacle for our progress as the world community. It is the menace of drugs and intoxicants that has beset the societies including the youth and the school children. As the President of Brazil pointed out, illicit drugs have become the most serious challenge faced by our societies today. While endorsing his ideas, I would urge the world community, the United Nations and all the states to commit themselves to fight illegal drugs collectively and individually through a robust international programme that is more organized and stronger than now.

In the domestic front, my government has taken effective measures to strengthen democracy, rule of law and good governance in the country paving the way for a positive change to ensure that there will be no more wars on the soils of my country, Sri Lanka. The reconciliation process that is underway today has learnt from the bitter experience of a brutal war of three decades. It will guarantee that my country will not see the cruelty of war and terrorism again and that all communities will live peacefully in a rational and a free-thinking

Sri Lanka. For this noble purpose, Sri Lanka welcomes the collaboration and the blessings of the world.

Sri Lanka, being a free, independent and a sovereign nation with territorial integrity, like all other nations that have gathered here today, will find its own recipe for the reconciliation process and necessary transformation and reform respecting the indigenous thinking, that is essential to and accepted by the local people. Sri Lanka will adhere to a social democratic policy, and work closely with the world towards the progress to prosperity and wisdom along with the rest of the world. After a war that traumatized the nation for three decades, we have started the journey towards reconciliation and lasting peace. However, we have no hurry. We trod each wise step with care, vigilance, patience and persistence. My beloved Sri Lanka has big dreams. I look forward to your blessings and collaboration to accomplish them.

I must thank the United Nations and its offices for the support they give to Sri Lanka. I am honoured to mention the contribution made by the outgoing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to foster international development, strengthen democracy and human rights. It is a blessing to the humankind.

In conclusion, I emphasize my commitment to empower our youth with the best knowledge in the world and to make Sri Lanka an exemplary democracy in the world. My government will fulfil its responsibilities towards the people and I seek your assistance and blessings in this noble endeavor.

Thank you

May the Triple Gem bless you!

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