

Address of His Excellency R. Premadasa,
President of the Democratic Socialist
Republic of Sri Lanka at the ceremonial
opening of the 3rd International Islamic
Seminar for South East Asia organised by the
World Islamic Call Society, at BMICH,

Colombo Monday 21st, May 1990

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Mr. Chairman,
The Representatives of the Islamic Call Society;
Dr. Shariff,
Your Excellencies,

I am glad to be associated with you on this important occasion. I congratulate the Islamic Call Society of Libyan Jamahiriya for organising this Seminar on the Role of Islamic DA'WAH in confronting Modern Challenges.

You have rightly chosen Sri Lanka as the venue of this International Seminar. From time immemorial Sri Lanka has been called the Dhammadipa – the Island of Righteousness. I extend a warm welcome to all of you. You represent the South and South East Asian countries in particular.

I am pleased to find amidst you His Excellency Dr. Shariff of the Libyan Jamahiriya. The participation of distinguished theologians, scholars and workers engaged in spreading the message of Islam will undoubtedly, make your deliberations meaningful. I am confident that your deliberations will be fruitful. I am sure you will be able to find realistic solutions to the many challenges facing us. We have similar activities called Dhammaduta or the mission to spread the Teachings of Lord Buddha.

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Incidentally, it was interesting to read that during the reign of Aggabodhi III a royal fact finding mission was despatched to Arabia on hearing of Prophet Muhammad's mission. These testify to our close relations – age old ties with the Islamic world. Islam came here through saintly missionaries. Therefore, it is no wonder that it was well-received, and has existed and endured on our soil.

As time went on settlements appeared. Sri Lanka with its legacy of Buddhist tolerance and spirit of accommodation welcomed the Islamic faith and its adherents. After the 16th century when our country went under successive Western powers the lot of the Muslims was sometimes hard. The Sinhalese of course were not found wanting in kindly treatment. It must be said that at those times Muslims had fought the foreign aggressors in the armies of our kings, particularly of Mayadunne and Rajasinghe.

The Muslims are an integral part of our Sri Lankan nation. They have always stood for the interest of the country. In the struggle for our independence, especially at the crucial concluding stages the Muslim leaders played an important and decisive role.

The Muslim people of this country, as I said earlier, are an integral and vital part of the nation. They enjoy all rights including the freedom of conscience available to other citizens under the Constitution. It will be of interest for you to know that here in Sri Lanka we have a special Ministry for Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs. This is something, that is unique for any non-Muslim country in any part of the world.

Sri Lanka pursues a policy of peace, friendship and goodwill with all countries irrespective of their ideological or political orientations. This constitutes the bed-rock of our foreign policy. Our relations are cordial with Arab and Muslim countries. It is our endeavour to take them forward extending to all fields of state activity.

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I know what is central to Arab and Muslim aspirations today. It is the dismantling of Israeli aggression and occupation of Arab territories and the establishment of Palestinian statehood. It is also in keeping with the decisions of the UN. It is in pursuance of this policy that recently we ordered the closure of the Israel Interests Section in our country.

It is my hope and trust that you will through Da'wah spread the message of peace, humanity and goodwill. The manner in which missionaries should conduct this is explained in Chapter 16, Verse 125 of the Holy Quran as follows:

“Invite all to the way of Thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and arguing with them in ways that are best and most gracious.”

Therefore it will be seen that Da'wah or Dhammaduta should not be forced on anyone. The message should be propagated peacefully, harmlessly and convincingly.

The human kind is one single family. “The whole creation is the family of God” says one of the Traditions of the Prophet. The Prophet proclaimed: “O Lord, Lord of my life and everything in the universe, I affirm that all human beings are brother to one another”. Indeed this is the message our divided world caught up in conflicts is yearning for.

The central doctrine of Islam stands for compassionateness of God. Also it stands for compassion to all living beings. This is central to Buddha Dhamma as well as to Hinduism and Christianity. It has been said that the ultimate test of all dogma and religion lies in the writ of compassion. Let us endeavour to translate this into every day practice. It is a role no religion could abdicate.

I thank you.

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