

Housing Development an Investment in Mankind



HON. R. PREMADASA

Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

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**A Collection of Speeches
on Housing Development
by Hon. R. Premadasa
Prime Minister of the
Democratic Socialist Republic
of Sri Lanka**

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**“Root of our crisis,
a lack of a moral
approach
to world problems and
international
understanding”**

*Address by the Hon. R. Premadasa, M.P., Prime Minister of the
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, at the 35th
Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly on 29th
September, 1980*

*Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,*

IT is my privilege to address this premier international forum and to convey to you the fraternal greetings of the people of Sri Lanka. I do so as the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, under the New Republican Constitution of 1978.

As distinguished delegates would know, our new Constitution was adopted by the freely elected representatives of the people of Sri Lanka after a popular mandate which brought our Government into power with a five-sixth majority in Parliament.

I have approached my task today, not to indulge myself in the purple of high flown rhetoric or to lecture to this distinguished audience on all the problems in the world. I do not have any pretensions to having a key to unlock the door to Utopia.

I come before you in a spirit of humility to join you in the common quest of mankind for peace, for justice and for equality.

These are values which the people of my country hold sacred in the light of experience gained over many years in the practice of Democracy. Next year, we commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the attainment of Universal Adult Franchise. They are also values which our people have consistently accepted as truths by virtue of their deeply religious tradition.

I come before you to share some of my own thoughts moulded in the crucible of working with people, at all levels, in the slums, in the villages, in Government and out of Government – during a political career spanning over three decades.

May I, at the outset, extend to you, Mr. President, the warm congratulations of myself and my Delegation on your election as President of this Thirty-fifth Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your country and mine have enjoyed a long and fruitful bond of friendship and co-operation, which we, in Sri Lanka, value very highly. Your rich diplomatic experience and your practical wisdom will, I am sure, be invaluable assets in guiding the deliberations of this Session. May I offer the good wishes of my Delegation and assure you of our co-operation in the discharge of your duties.

I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation to the outgoing President, Ambassador Salim of Tanzania. His tenure is probably unique for the number of special and extraordinary sessions he had to preside over. His impartiality, understanding and sagacity, were of inestimable value during all these sessions.

It is also a pleasant task today to pay a tribute to the work of

the Secretary-General whose consistent dedication to the cause of peace and his tireless efforts in pursuit of it, are well known.

This year, the international community is the poorer for having lost some of its most eminent leaders. The death of Josep Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, removed from our midst, the last of the giants of the World War II era. Few world leaders have helped to mould the structure of post-war international relations as President Tito did. We, in Sri Lanka, remember him with admiration and affection as a founding father of Non-Alignment – a policy which my President, His Excellency J. R. Jayewardene, has said :

“Runs like a golden thread through the fabric of our country's Foreign Policy.”

We mourn with the people of Japan in the passing away of their Prime Minister Ohira; we grieve with the people of Botswana over the loss of their founder President, Sir Seretse Khama, and we sympathise with the people of Jordan over the untimely death of their Prime Minister. Sharif Abdul Hamid Sharaf.

At this Session, we welcome to our midst two new members – Zimbabwe and St. Vincent and Grenadines. My welcome of Zimbabwe must inevitably be tinged with a very personal note of happiness. I had the privilege of being present at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka last year when the decisive step which led to the independence of Zimbabwe was taken.

It is a matter of personal gratification to me that the cause we argued for and supported on behalf of your country has been fulfilled and that Zimbabwe has emerged to join us as a sovereign state in this international body. The admission of these two members illustrate once again the fundamental principle of universality in our membership and the equality of all member nations irrespective of size, power, population or prestige.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, I have the honour to convey to this august assembly, the greetings of President J. R. Jayewardene and his good wishes for the success of this Session.

Mr. President, over the last few months there has been increasingly expressed by world leaders the view that the international situation is deteriorating. Indeed, I think there is hardly anyone who would disagree with this. The disagreement, if at all, is in identifying the causes for this deterioration.

We are, without doubt, at a crucial juncture in International relations. What we **DO** – much more than what we **SAY** – will

shape the international order in the next two decades of the century. Perhaps, more than at any other time in human history, we stand today at a decisive crossroad. One way could lead us to a world of immense possibilities for the good of the human race. The other could be the path of decline and the destruction of all human values as we know them today.

What is our response going to be to this challenge?

The dimensions of the challenge are so large, the issues so complex that the response must perforce emerge from where we are today. Certainly, the problems cannot be solved by nations acting on their own or as small groups of countries. Unfortunately, at a time when our response should be global, we see increasing signs of nations trying to seek solutions to the problems individually.

Thirty-five years ago, the world evolved this international body, the United Nations, whose charter still represents the highest ideals of mankind. It is a matter for concern that its credibility as an institution, yet capable of assisting in the resolution of these problems, is being doubted today. The crisis situation we face, makes it even more compelling that we act purposefully and positively through the mechanisms that the UN system provides for joint and collective action.

In our own region, we welcome the holding of the International Conference next year under the aegis of the United Nations to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. It is a collective effort on the part of the Indian Ocean countries and others to ensure that the Indian Ocean will, in fact, be a peaceful place. This peace we seek in order to permit the countries in our region to focus their attention, concentrate their energies and employ their resources to build prosperous economies for their citizens.

We cannot afford the grotesque distortions that tensions, militarization and arms piling can cause. Implicit in this declaration is that cardinal tenet of international politics – non-interference in the internal affairs of countries and the rejection of the use of force.

Sri Lanka has long been known as a centre of Theravada Buddhism. It is a philosophy where among the noble truths, non-violence is of paramount significance. This emphasis on Ahimsa or Non-Violence has made Buddhism a major international force and a means of promoting understanding between nations during its long historical career of over 2,500 years.

The best known instance occurred at the very outset when it inspired the famous Dharma Vijaya – Victory of Righteousness – of Emperor Dharma Asoka in which he attempted to establish a moral basis for relations between states. Emperor Dharma Asoka sent personal emissaries to contemporary rulers in West Asia and South Asia, bearing messages of goodwill and advocating a code of righteous conduct, which to a large extent embodied the tenets of Buddhism.

The Emperor's action is unique in history and represents the only initiative of its kind by a ruler to bring a moral approach to international relations.

Perhaps, what is lacking in our countries is a moral approach to world problems and international understanding and this may be the root of our crisis.

Over the ages, human society has endeavoured to move from the rule of the jungle to the rule of law. Could we not work for the reconstruction of a world society based on the Law of Love – Non-Violence? Would we, from where we are, set an example to all to follow this rule at every level of life, in our personal relations as well as in the relations between nations?

This, in my view, would be the ultimate fulfilment of this unique Organization to which we belong.

Armed conflicts and the threat of such conflicts remain a danger to mankind. The international situation has many flash points. To continue to let them exist and to allow new flash points to emerge leads to a dangerous mood of cynicism and indifference where the use of force is tolerated and accepted as inevitable.

There is disenchantment too among those who follow the rules, those who are law abiding, that the lawless win the day. How often have we seen the righteous suffer, while the wrong doer prospers. It is the same in international relations as it is in normal society. Must one shout to be heard? Must one be feared to be respected? Must one threaten to be assisted? Are democracy and human rights to be taken for granted? Is force and the threat of force, the only pass-word to success? The world seems to be fearfully close to such a mood of cynicism.

There is glib talk of a new cold war and plentiful offers of military aid. We must, therefore, take positive and collective action, not only to create our zone of peace, but to ensure that a hundred zones of peace, both in space and in the minds of men, are created.

In this context, the Non-Aligned Movement with whose origins Sri Lanka is proud to be associated continues to have a vital role to play. Ninety-four of the one hundred and fifty-four nations of this world body subscribe to the principles of

Non-Alignment. Many more, as observers and guests, have broad sympathy with the aims and aspirations of the Movement.

There are several areas in our relationship within the United Nations which call for action of a kind which take the international community forward together. Many of these are in the area of what are termed economic relations.

We have for example made several declarations that developing countries should have a greater share of the industrial output of the world – as much as 25 per cent by the year 2000. At the same time we see the erection of a wall of protectionism in the developed world which constitutes an effective barrier to the development of industries by the denial of markets.

We see this disparity between intent and achievement in other areas as well. In the area of concessionary aid – in official development assistance – at the commencement of the 1970s, we solemnly declared that ODA should be at the level of at least 0.77 per cent of the GNP of developed countries if the developing world economies were to be rehabilitated. At the end of the decade, the actual figure was only half of this, 0.35 per cent of GNP.

The prospects for the future in the light of the deepening recession that the developed world faces seems, therefore, even more stark. The difference between the intention and the act which these two examples illustrate is, if I may say so, a result of our inability to see the mutuality of our interest, and consequently of our attempts to resolve the problems we foresee, unilaterally.

The facts are clear in the case of both protectionism and aid. It has been demonstrated that a progressive lowering of trade barriers in the North, would not only reduce the number of unemployed in the Third World, but would even result in an increase in jobs in the North as a direct consequence of the increase in North-South Trade. It has also been shown that protectionism holds a greater threat to jobs in the North, and self-interest would require the abandonment of policies which appear so self-evidently short-sighted.

The idea that there should be a re-allocation of industries in the world which would benefit the developing countries, is not likely to be easily accepted. But it is a fact that in terms of the global economy, many industries in the developed world are no longer economically viable.

When developing countries take similar steps and band together to increase export earnings, they are criticised for

taking measures contrary to the common good. What then, I ask, is the justice in this situation? Must we confront each other by adversary strategies of this kind?

The case of ODA is equally as clear. It surely is in the interests of the developed world to provide the poor countries with the concessionary aid that can help to re-structure their economies. For as they grow in strength, their imports will grow with resultant benefits to the developed economies. But the sad fact is that at the present time, when concessionary finance is most in need, there is talk in the developed world of holding back inflation and the need to cut down public expenditure.

I hope that ODA will not be an area that has to bear these cuts. If the cut has to fall on public expenditure in the developed world, we make the plea that it may fall gently on overseas aid.

In addition to the moral dimension that should motivate the giver of aid, there is the more emphatic consideration of self-interest. The inter-dependence of the world economies are such, that if the poor falter, they will not be able to buy the goods of the rich. The poverty of the poor – which in many cases they have learned to live with – will inevitably pull down the rich as well.

There is also the continuing anomaly that confronts us of aid flows being reduced while defence expenditures increase. In the light of Third World poverty, the difference between annual global military expenditure, now approaching US \$ 450 billion and official development aid of some US \$ 20 billion, can only be termed outrageous.

This means not only money but the diversion of real resources such as manpower in the form of scientists and engineers, and of the most modern technologies, which could otherwise be used in the solution of the problems constraining growth in the less-developed world.

We also know, speaking on behalf of a country which spends less than 3 per cent of its national budget on defence, that the disease seems to have spread, that even some of the poorest of our countries deem it necessary to spend heavily on armaments. These modern weapons of war which sometimes come in as aid are possibly the best examples of a misdirected transfer of resources.

It is an open question as to whether money spent on armaments or defence, would in the long run contribute more to international security than money spent on aid to the poorer countries.

Why is it that when the religions of the world – Christianity,

Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism proclaim the folly of war and the greed for power, nations continue to arm themselves? The *Dhammapada* – the words of the Buddha – touches the crux of this dilemma in the saying:

*“Tanhāya Jāyati Soko
Tanhāya Jāyati Bhayam,
Tanhāya Vippamuttassa
N’atthi Soko, Kuto Bhayam?”*

“From craving springs grief, from craving
springs fear,
For him who is wholly free from craving
there is no grief ;
Whence can there be fear?”

In the search for peace – in our task of waging war against war, perhaps we need to heed the teachings of our great religions and free ourselves from fear.

As bilateral aid flows are likely to be reduced in the face of the impending recession, the need for a multi-lateral funding agency, such as the proposed World Development Fund, gains heightened significance. The mechanisms by which the OPEC surpluses could be recycled to provide concessionary finance to the developing countries have been clearly described in recent studies.

It is our hope that the creation of such a Development Fund will be speedily effected and will provide yet another source of capital for the re-structuring of the economies of the poorer countries.

While on this subject, may I also make the plea that the increasingly stringent conditions imposed by the multi-lateral development agencies, be reviewed in the light of the quite different circumstances that now apply in the world, particularly so in the developing countries. The rules and regulations framed for a more ordered international economic situation must surely change to suit the more complex realities of today.

We have just concluded the Special Session devoted to International Economic Co-operation and Development.

We have identified several areas in which considerable work has yet to be done. I am heartened that the process of negotiation on a broad level of participation will engender fruitful results.

I want to emphasize the word ‘negotiation’. We should not be preoccupied with speeches or strategies. It is unfortunate, but true, that development strategies have not done much to enhance development.

We have succeeded in the last thirty-five years in safeguarding ourselves from the scourge of global war. We have not, however, saved ourselves from the scourge of poverty which brings sorrow to mankind and affronts the dignity and worth of the human person.

In global terms the poverty line seems to coincide with the North-South divide. One quarter of the world's population living in the North enjoy three quarters of the world's income. While three quarters of the world's population living in the South, have to share the balance quarter of the world's income.

The inequality in the use of real resources and the depth of the problem of poverty are, I believe, tellingly expressed in this equation. The international community has engaged in numerous exercises to reduce this disparity and to remove this scourge.

Most recently we have had the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, popularly referred to as the Brandt Commission. Eleven years before Brandt, we had Pearson. It is chastening to recall some of the words of that Commission on International Development headed by the late Lester Pearson –

“International Development,” he said, “is the great challenge of our age. Our response to it will show whether we understand the implications of inter-dependence or whether we prefer to delude ourselves that the poverty and deprivation of the great majority of mankind can be ignored without tragic consequences for all.”

The Brandt Commission is no less cogent in stressing inter-dependence; no less concerned with the moral imperative of development and no less bold and imaginative in the action plan proposed, both for the present and for the future. Sadly what gives cause for despair, is the reaction of the world community to these significant reports. Rather than stimulate negotiation, the Brandt Commission Report is in danger of being placed on a shelf, along with similar reports of the past.

Whenever an action plan or a strategy is mooted, there are countless reasons put forward to delay their implementation. We are either told that the time is inopportune or we are asked to scale down the plans. Whatever the reason – the result is the same – inaction.

We in the developing countries are not asking for charity on a global scale. We do not believe that poverty can be alleviated by charity. It must be eliminated by removing exploitation.

You cannot make everyone and every country equal. You can give everyone and every country an equal opportunity.

The exploitation which leads to poverty is endemic in the structure of international economic relations today. That is why this structure has to be changed. That is why we talk of a New International Economic Order. It is an order where human rights are respected; where economic inequalities and poverty are eliminated; where malnutrition and illiteracy are removed.

I am not talking of a new order which must exist between nations and nations only. We have to institute this order in our own countries. We cannot have world peace without being at peace ourselves – in our country, within our society, within our family, and, if I may say so, within each of us ourselves.

Before we ask for restraint from others, we must practise restraint and control ourselves. We cannot have a New International Economic Order abroad and an Old Economic Order of Exploitation at home. We cannot ask for the removal of exploitation and inequalities among nations and allow economic oppression and disparities to flourish within our nations.

The emancipation of mankind from exploitation must take place both nationally and internationally. The structural imbalances and inequalities within nations are linked together. That is as true for the South as it is for the North. There are many glass houses. Let us change these houses. Let us also not throw stones.

Mr. President, a large part of my life and my own political endeavours have been in the fields of local government and housing. The need, therefore, for involving the people in the decision-making process, both locally as well as internationally, is clear to me.

I see the provision of adequate housing as a basic aspect in the global assault on poverty. We must eliminate the problems of overcrowding, insanitation and insecurity. Housing is important in creating the environment in which our people have to live.

In the rush for development, urbanization has run out of control, spawning ugly slums and ghettos, depopulating rural areas and overcrowding conurbations. Urban poverty, congestion and squalor are problems common to many of our developing countries.

It is said that as much as 20 per cent of our people are seriously under-nourished in the developing countries; 50 per cent do not have safe water; 60 per cent do not have proper

health care; 20 per cent of the babies die before they reach the age of five.

There are equally depressing figures for unemployment, education and other basic needs. Each of us, in our own way, are attempting to tackle these formidable problems. It is my belief that housing provides a key to the solution of several of these disabilities.

The problem of housing is not confined to Sri Lanka. It is not a problem confined to Asia. It is a global problem.

I, therefore, call for the declaration of an International Year committed to homes for the homeless. Perhaps the year may be specially focused on the rehabilitation of the shanty dweller. The replacement of shanties with decent housing is not a peripheral part of development. It is at the very core. It is an investment in mankind.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, I have touched, if only briefly, on some of the issues that the world will increasingly have to confront and resolve in the years ahead. Standing as we do on the threshold of the decade of the eighties, it is our duty to face the problems fully and squarely.

Conflict as much as co-operation has been a part of the history of the human race. In past times the cause for conflict between peoples, has been almost parochial – language, race and religion have divided men, and in their name, men fought and died. Sadly, even today, these symbols which man created continue to divide man.

We have also had major confrontations on ideology and we have spoken much of the antagonism between East and West.

The issues which have so clearly emerged today, as symptoms of the malaise which afflicts the world – Inflation, the Imbalance of Payments, the Monetary System, Food, Security, the Commodity Problem and the like, indicate that the future battle lines would be drawn on even a more fundamental basis. Perhaps between poor and rich, between South and North.

It is surely to forestall this conflict that the debate between the North and South must be fanned into a dialogue and then be quickened into an agreed Agenda of Action for today, tomorrow and the day after.

I believe that our collective will and our united action, not only at the national level, but in the global context, will enable us to overcome the challenges of the present. We cannot pass the buck. It is our world. We must not only survive in it. We must improve it.

*Devo Vassatu Kālena
Sassa Sampatti Hetu Cha
Phito Bhavatu Loko Cha
Rājā Bhavatu Dhammiko*

May the rain fall in time
May the harvest be rich
May the world be prosperous
May the rulers be righteous!

I THANK YOU.

The Third World has.....

More than 70%
of the
world's people



10% of the
world's
merchant ships



Approximately
12% of the
world's railway
traffic



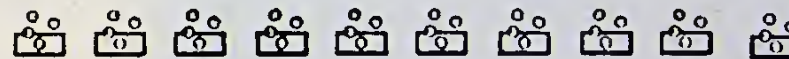
Approximately
20% of the world's
radio receivers
and transmitters



Approximately
8% of world
industrial output



Approximately
10% of the
world's GNP



Less than 20%
of world trade



Approximately
5% of the world's
research and
development
capacity



“Housing and Shelter People’s Birthright”

*Address by the Hon. R. Premadasa, M. P., Prime Minister of
Sri Lanka at the Fourth Session of the United Nations
Commission on Human Settlements held in Manila on 27th
April, 1981.*

*Madam Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,*

IT is indeed a pleasure for me to have this opportunity to address The Fourth Session of the Commission on Human Settlements which meets in this magnificent Convention Centre in Manila.

May I at the outset, extend my sincere thanks to His Excellency President Ferdinand Marcos and you, Madam Chairman, the First Lady of the Philippines, for the very warm welcome given to us on our arrival in Manila, and for the splendid arrangements that have been provided for our meeting.

Before I present my report on what we in Sri Lanka have been doing in the field of Housing and Human Settlements, permit me to dwell for a moment on the global picture today, and of the problems all of us collectively face in our common battle of providing our people with the basic necessities of housing and shelter which are their birthright.

Throughout history for much of mankind, the search for food and shelter has been a desperate one. It took a long time for society to evolve into that state, where for most of us the basic essentials of a decent life appear to be close at hand. Man's achievements in various fields, in medicine, in communication, in transport and in construction have enabled wonderful advances in many directions. Yet with all the potential in hand for development, three-fourth of the human race or more live on the edge of starvation. The scourge of poverty which brings sorrow and affronts the dignity and worth of the human race afflicts many of our nations, particularly those in the developing world.

It was only recently that the world community had recognized the importance of human settlements which would provide decent living conditions for the vast majority of humanity. The governments and peoples of many countries have been resolutely re-ordering their priorities to channel resources into these fields and it appeared that we were set on a course which would lead on to success. However the grievous blows with which the world economy has been pummelled in the last few years, has meant that even the modest gains that could have been made have been negated. In many places, it looks as if we are back at the beginning. The future indeed looks bleak unless new initiatives are forthcoming and the challenge that is upon us is faced resolutely and fearlessly.

Your Country, Madam Chairman, provides a fine example of the part that dedicated leadership can play in taking the people forward towards prosperity and progress. What you have done

in the field of human settlements provides a resounding indication of an unswerving determination of what sound planning and resolute leadership can achieve.

As many of us who are in the political arena will know, housing and human settlements are not usually a high priority area with governments or state treasuries. Industry, agriculture, transport and infrastructure usually claim the larger part of the national budget. Sometimes unfortunately, defence or armaments quite illogically draws resources away from what we all know are the more basic services.

To us in the field of human settlements however, these must seem as a diversion of resources away from the areas of critical need. To us the importance of a home – the crucible in which the soul of the nation is forged through the family – and its importance in maintaining traditions and values of the society are abundantly clear.

I believe, with all my heart that if you give a man a decent home, you have laid the sure foundations of making him a decent and useful member of the community. Think then of the tremendous savings – the social costs – that you save through the prevention of disease, disorder, lawlessness, the pollution of the environment and the loss of life itself if you can give a man a home. I can illustrate with many examples from my own country that the benefits of providing a home is not only material but also moral and spiritual. I believe that even from a hard materialistic point of view, investment in housing does, through the stimulation it provides in the construction sector, have a ripple effect which influences employment and production as well. So investment in housing is not only social, but in our view, a very important economic investment.

It was for these reasons and to meet the challenge posed by the ill winds of inflation and recession which beset our economies in the recent past that I called last year in my address at the United Nations for an International Year dedicated to homes for the homeless. We shall deal with this proposal as a substantive item on the agenda tomorrow.

Madam Chairman and Delegates, permit me to only state now that the concept of an International Year for the Homeless is fully consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I am delighted that Sri Lanka's proposal was accepted in toto at the meeting of Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers in Delhi in February this year. The Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned countries recognizing the lack of adequate housing as a major problem facing many developing countries, had urged member

countries to support all measures leading to the declaration of an International Year committed to homes for the poor and the homeless. I accept with great humility this convincing demonstration of support and solidarity on a vital issue.

Permit me to make a short presentation on the progress we have made in Sri Lanka since the Third Session of the UNCHS. Last month we conducted our National Population and Housing Census. The Census gave the population of the country as 14.7 m. with 74 per cent rural and 26 per cent living in the urban areas. Our Annual Rate of Growth is estimated to be 1.7 per cent.

These figures underline for us the need for more land and houses, employment opportunities and the provision of facilities for social and cultural life. The special distribution of the population with a high percentage living in rural areas also presents special problems to us. Our basic questions are:—

- * How do we improve the quality of life in our existing settlements?
- * How do we create the new settlements that are required for our growing population?

On its assumption of office in 1977, our government adopted a policy package to chart out a course for the country's social and economic development. There were four main elements in the package:

- * The harnessing of our longest river, the *Mahaweli Ganga* for the development of new agricultural lands and a quick increase in hydro-power generation;
- * The provision of opportunities for investment of capital both local and foreign through the establishment of Investment Promotion Zones and the granting of tax concessions for Approved Industry;
- * A massive Urban and Housing Development Programme which brought in its wake land reclamation as well as the development of infrastructure;
- * A complete liberalisation of trade, finance and industry. Our policies paid off. Despite the ravages of inflation and the depressing global economy, the country recorded a Growth Rate of 5.5 per cent in 1980.

We also have a comprehensive human settlements policy. We have planned for new agricultural settlements.

We began the construction of a 100,000 houses in urban and rural areas using state funds. We are developing urban and rural infrastructure facilities.

We began building model villages under the Village Re-awakening Movement. Our total investment over the six year

period (1978-1983) of our government would be Rs. 63 billion or US dollars 3.64 billion.

To carry forward this great programme of work, we created two new institutions, the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA). We have also set up a Central Environmental Authority to preserve and protect the environment in our country.

One of the primary functions of the Urban Development Authority is urban physical planning. In addition to dealing with the threat posed to the environment by an unplanned growth of beach tourist resorts, the physical planning of beach areas too have now been entrusted to the UDA.

As in most other developing countries, our urban centres lack proper infrastructure facilities or the available resources are themselves inadequate. Although we do not have a serious problem of rural urban migration the momentum of development and new commercial and economic activity have brought the existing facilities, such as water supply and sewage disposal to near breaking point. We have therefore embarked on a major infrastructure development programme with the assistance of the World Bank to improve the water supply and sewage disposal facilities in the city of Colombo and in other important towns. The total estimated investment is US Dollars 102 million.

Furthermore, we were faced with the problem of urban congestion and our housing shortage had assumed grave proportions. One of the cardinal elements in the government's housing programme is the construction of 36,000 houses in urban areas, mainly for the low income groups. Our strategy with regard to new urban housing has been too prompt. We were faced with the constraints with a limited availability of land and the heavy cost of reclaiming of low cost land. So we decided that a large proportion of our 36,000 urban houses would be in satellite towns. In 1980 we completed work on two important satellite towns to the North and South of Colombo and this will greatly ease the housing shortage in our capital city.

During the year 1980, the government through the National Housing Development Authority, took active steps to promote private sector low-income and middle-income housing development. We amended the Rent Act and the ceiling on Housing Property Law and removed the obnoxious provisions which prevented entrepreneur investment in housing. We have removed rent control in respect of all new houses. In addition the NHDA took steps to release State lands to entrepreneurs for housing development.

The government continued to grant home-builder loans through the Department of National Housing to low-income and low-middle income persons at concessionary interest rates. The home-builder loans programme will be further expanded so that loans could be given for home building through commercial banks. The government intends to provide concessionary re-financing facilities to these institutions.

Developing countries can ill afford to allow its existing housing stock to run down. We have therefore actively encouraged the proper maintenance of existing houses by granting low interest loans through the Department of National Housing and the government-owned banks.

Owing to the constraint of resources, there is no way of eliminating all the slums and shanties in the near future. However, we can improve their conditions. The government after a careful study of the problem has charged the Urban Development Authority with the task of up-grading and improving the slums and shanties that clutter the major cities of Sri Lanka, especially Colombo. The provision of common amenities in slum and shanty settlements is the responsibility of the Common Amenities Board. In 1980 the Common Amenities Board has been able to provide improved water supply and toilet facilities to 260 tenement and shanty gardens benefiting 4,300 households. They have also been able to aid the up-grading of existing shanty dwellings by effecting improvements to the structures as well as providing lighting. The results of our efforts in 1980, the relative ease with which they have been achieved, and the tremendous public response to the programme have encouraged us to expand it in the coming years.

The city of Colombo with its sprawling metropolis is the hub of commercial activity in the country. It plays a crucial role in servicing the needs of economic and commercial development. With economic activity gathering momentum under the new economic policies of the government, the need to develop the city of Colombo and its metropolis was imperative.

The government of Sri Lanka assigned this task to the Urban Development Authority. During the last year, the UDA has been able to continue its work of re-planning, re-zoning and re-developing large areas of the city of Colombo. Several vital projects designed to strengthen the economic base of the city were continued. In addition, the UDA was able to promote several private developers, especially expatriate investors, to invest in large scale development projects such as hotel developments, super markets, luxury apartment houses, etc. The total investment pledged during the year 1980 was around Rs. 4,800 million or US Dollars 322 million. Not only did the

UDA promote these investors but it also provided them with land and other facilities at fair prices.

The development of the new Administrative Capital and Parliamentary Complex was intended primarily to ease the congestion in the city of Colombo. This is one of the high priority projects of the government of Sri Lanka. The construction work on this project was continued under the aegis of the UDA and the work is now actually ahead of schedule. It is envisaged that this project which involves reclamation of land, provision of infrastructure facilities and construction of building complexes comprising of one million square feet of office space and the landscaping of large areas, could be completed on target by 1982.

Seventy-four per cent of our people live in the rural areas. The problems that beset them are many and varied. There is landlessness, and there is a shortage of housing. The increase in the rural housing stock cannot keep pace with the growth of the rural population. They lack proper roads, proper toilet facilities and good water.

Due to the low *per capita* income and the low capacity to save, rural people are unable to help themselves. A vibrant hard working rural community who could contribute to development, can only be created if these hardships are mitigated concurrently with the development of other rural economic activities. The government, therefore, embarked on an unprecedented programme to create new settlements and improve the quality of existing settlements. The aim was to give the rural masses a stable economic base and to provide them with adequate facilities for economic and social upliftment. No doubt, this has been a very ambitious and daring programme. But the results of the last three and a half years show that if we persist in our policies and programmes we would be able to liberate the rural peasant from lethargy and dependancy and make him a self-reliant, resourceful individual, contributing to the development of the country.

One of the major thrusts of the economic programmes of the government was the extensive opening up of new agricultural land, especially in the *Mahaweli* river basin. Under this project alone, we hope to create 350 new townships, 1,600 new village centres and 8,000 new hamlets comprising of 1.5 million people. In line with our accepted policy of improving the quality of life in our rural areas, the government commenced an ambitious programme for the construction of 50,000 rural cottages within the plan period of six years. This will certainly alleviate the rural housing shortage. Inadequate housing and

poor quality houses are the main factors which degrade life in rural settlements.

The Rural Housing Programme implemented by the National Housing Development Authority is essentially a self-help programme. The NHDA provides the land, a package of building materials, the technical know-how, and the settlers build the houses through their voluntary labour. Infrastructure facilities in the settlement are also constructed by co-operative effort or by '*Shramadana*' by the settlers themselves, whilst the NHDA provides the basic building materials. The settlers repay the cost of the building materials to the NHDA over a period of 30 years and become absolute owners of such houses. During the years 1978, 1979 and 1980 the NHDA was able to complete around 5,000 such rural cottages and commence work on another 13,000.

The NHDA adopted two type plans for its rural cottages, each with a floor area of 333 sq. ft. and 382 sq. ft. respectively. The houses were built out of conventional building materials, viz. brick and mortar, with tiled roofs and cement rendered floors. At the beginning, the cost per unit was Rs. 15,000/- (US Dollars 830) for the type one and Rs. 18,000/- (US Dollars 1,000) for type two. In mid-1980, these costs rose to Rs. 18,000/- (US Dollars 1,000) and Rs. 24,000/- (US Dollars 1,300) respectively.

The entire Rural Housing Programme in Sri Lanka is being financed out of government budgetary allocations, and the cost escalation which manifested itself in mid-1980 not only put an immediate strain on the current programme, but it also brought into question the future of the entire programme. Although we had bargained for a certain degree of inflation due to our own expanded construction activity, we did not envisage that domestic inflationary pressures compounded by global inflation could put into jeopardy the future of the entire programme. We were therefore placed with the unhappy choice of either cutting back the programme and betraying the hopes of the people, or proceeding along the same basis at an enormous and unbearable cost to the country.

This crisis posed a challenge to the government, to the officers in charge of the Rural Housing Programme, and the people at large. The challenge was to bring down the unit cost of houses drastically and at the same time to provide houses acceptable to the rural people. This crisis made us realise that the cause for our predicament lay in the false building values being used in the Rural Housing Programme. Conventional building values could only respond in a negative way to the forces of inflation. Therefore, we paused and asked the question

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whether there wasn't an alternative set of building values which could respond positively to the pressures of inflation. This opened a healthy debate among administrators, architects, sociologists and politicians. One proposition put forward was that we go back to the traditional building values of the rural people. It did not take us long to realise the potential of such a re-discovery. We therefore launched on the building of several experimental prototypes, using traditional methods and indigenous building materials. These experimental houses were of various types:-

- * Houses built out of blocks of laterite rock extracted from the earth, or pieces of weathered laterite rock collected from the surface with mud mortar as the bonding agent. The walls were plastered either with cement or lime.
- * Houses built with rubble extracted and broken at the site itself with mud mortar bonding and lime/cement/plastering.
- * Houses made of rammed earth blocks or '*Sinva Ram*', as they are better known with mud floor and plastering.
- * Houses built with wattle and daub or '*Varichi*' as it is known in Sri Lanka.

These experiments proved a resounding success. We saw that costs could be brought down as much as 50 per cent.

Quite apart from the cost reductions, there were many other advantages. The use of local indigenous building materials liberated the settler from the market forces as he became his own supplier of materials. There was also greater involvement by the settler and his family in the process of house building, as they had to collect and supply their own materials.

When some of these experimental types were used in actual settlements, we found that the people were quite happy to accept them. By a discreet re-interpretation of the traditional building culture of our rural people, we were able to provide them with a better and bigger house than the conventional brick and mortar house at a much lower cost. There was no doubt that these types could be used to satisfy the needs of various income categories of rural settlers.

We therefore decided to re-orient our entire Rural Housing Programme. All new rural houses would hereafter be built with indigenous building materials, using local techniques. This helped us to confront the forces of inflation, and continue the programme as originally intended, without any cutback.

An unexpected bonus in our search for alternative building values was a conscious attempt by our planners and architects to design houses functionally and aesthetically satisfying to the

rural people, with a more harmonious marriage of design to materials.

Policies and strategies relating to planning, design and construction of rural settlements not only affect the quality of life of the settler, but also have a direct bearing on the use of scarce national resources such as energy. Rural settlements therefore have to be planned carefully.

In the new agricultural settlements of the *Mahaweli* basin, a radical departure has been made with the past abandoning the ribbon type of development arranged along channel banks for the more rational pattern of cluster settlements, tiered in a hamlet village-town relationship. In planning new rural housing schemes and model villages, too, we have shown maximum adaptability to local functional needs, environmental considerations and energy conservations.

The development of rural infrastructure is a crying need in all developing countries. The construction of rural roads and the provision of good water are two paramount areas in any rural development policy. In Sri Lanka, we have over the last three years, commenced a programme under the Department of Local Government, for the construction of rural roads and the proper maintenance of approximately 16,000 miles of rural roads. Here again, we have discarded the use of heavy equipment and gone back to the use of human labour, which is abundant in rural areas.

The government of Sri Lanka has also through the National Water Supply and Drainage Board, commenced a programme for the supply of good drinking water to the rural people, especially in the water scarce areas of the country. Two projects are currently in operation under this programme. One is a project for the construction of hard rock tube wells in remote areas of the country where the population is without water during long periods of the year. In 1980, 350 such wells have been constructed. The second is the rural pipe borne water supply project which encompasses large areas of the country. Sixty-five such schemes were completed in 1980.

At the last session of the UNCHS in Mexico city, the Sri Lanka delegation reported how the Village Re-awakening Movement was born in our country and how it caught the imagination of our rural people. Our objective is to complete 400 such villages comprising of 30,000 housing units by 1983. It is with great pleasure that I report that in 1980 this Movement forged ahead amidst popular acclaim. We have been able to build 86 model villages up to now, and on the third anniversary of this Movement in June this year, we hope to complete 112 model villages with nearly 8,000 housing units. During the year 1980

we have been able to infuse new ideas and new concepts at grass-root level to ease the burdens of the village settler. Foremost among these is our slogan 'Housing for Shelter, Employment and Production.' We have been able to use the district and village Agricultural Extension Services of the government to help the villagers to grow food crops, subsidiary cash crops, and also animal husbandry. This, to some extent, would protect the villagers from the ravages of inflation, from which they are not immune. We have also been able to enlist a greater involvement by voluntary organizations in our Village Re-awakening Movement.

Our aim in the establishment of model villages under the Village Re-awakening Movement, is to create economically self-reliant, socially and culturally resilient, rural communities given to a simple way of life and living in harmony with nature, sharing the common weal. These are the values which sustained our ancient rural communities, and for our rural people the Village Re-awakening Movement has been a process of re-discovery of their lost values and identity.

My delegation has distributed a small booklet on the Village Re-awakening Movement in Sri Lanka, and we would welcome to Sri Lanka any of those present here who wish to know more about this movement.

In conclusion may I say that 1980 has been a rewarding year for us in Sri Lanka. Rewarding in one sense, as we have been able to carry through our programmes in the field of human settlement and keep to the targets. Rewarding in another sense, that we have been able to face unprecedented challenges, but still find solutions to sustain the programmes to which we are committed.

Inflation which was our biggest problem was indeed a blessing in disguise. It made us re-think and re-adjust our policies, programmes and concepts, drawing inspiration from the innovative genius of our rural people.

This boundless reservoir is there in all developing countries which are the heirs to ancient cultures. In times of crisis there is no better source of inspiration than the collective wisdom of the people. I offer to this august Assembly the Sri Lanka experience as a manifestation of the vitality and vigour that peoples participation brings to national programme of strengthening human settlements.

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Shelter- The need for Global Action

*Address by the Hon. R. Premadasa, M.P., Prime Minister of Sri Lanka,
at the Sixth Session of the United Nations Commission on
Human Settlements held in Helsinki on 25th April, 1983*

*Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies & Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address this distinguished gathering at the Sixth Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements.

As you are aware, we are meeting at an important time, when the United Nations General Assembly has accepted, at its Thirty-seventh Session, the proposal to designate 1987, as the 'International Year of Shelter for the Homeless'. Allow me, Mr. Chairman, to place on record at the very outset, my deep appreciation and gratitude, to the United Nations General Assembly and the other Agencies of the United Nations System which were associated with this proposal, for accepting the call for the declaration of an International Year on the subject of shelter.

It was with a deep sense of conviction and humility, that in my address to the UN General Assembly in 1980, (as the Leader of the Sri Lanka Delegation) I called for the declaration of an International Year committed to the provision of shelter for the homeless. It was my humble belief that an year devoted to the problems of the homeless, would contribute in no small measure, to focus the attention of the world community, on the need to provide better shelter to the poor, as an investment in mankind.

I am greatly encouraged by the response and enthusiasm with which it was received by the member countries. The political and intellectual appeal it seemed to offer, and the fervour with which it was argued and supported at all forums, was deeply gratifying. I have also observed with great interest the manner in which the proposal was enriched and deepened in form and substance, as it was carried through the process of consultation during the last two years.

Your presence at this august assembly today, reflects the interest and concern shown by the nations world over, in improving the shelter of the poor and the disadvantaged in our countries. The worsening conditions of our poor neighbourhoods have been a matter for great concern of our Governments, more particularly in the countries of the Third World. These neighbourhoods also provide the shelter for the majority of the 800 million people in the world, who are caught up in the malaise of absolute poverty. These people are further plagued by other factors which limit human life, such as malnutrition, disease, illiteracy and low-life expectancy. Nations throughout the world today are engaged in a search for appropriate policies and strategies for the improvement of conditions of shelter in these neighbourhoods, within the limits imposed by the resources available for such activities. With the

declaration of an International Year, this has undoubtedly become more urgent and insistent. I am therefore confident, that the deliberations of this forum, will go a long way in influencing the choice of alternatives in the future shelter policies and programmes in our countries.

Mr. Chairman, the celebrations connected with the International Year of Shelter, will be held during the latter half of the Third United Nations International Development Decade. The International Development Strategy, provides the framework for the realisation of the decade objectives of eradication of poverty and promotion of well-being. It clearly identifies provision of better shelter as a means of achieving this end. The global and national efforts related to improvements of shelter and neighbourhoods initiated before and during the proposed International Year, could therefore draw inspiration and strength from this fact. Our efforts will contribute in no small measure to hasten the attainment of the goals and objectives of the Third UN Development Decade. The period that lies ahead is, therefore, important. During these years, we should strive together to develop national shelter strategies and also a supporting world shelter strategy, which could help in the realisation of the objectives of the proposed Year.

The problem of poor shelter, is a part of a complexed tangle of poverty. In the long run, improvement of shelter and neighbourhoods will depend largely on patterns of national economic growth and the extent to which the poor would benefit from such growth. Unfortunately for most of the world's poor, the growth is too slow. It is also significant that the problem of shelter, as we see it today, is more than a problem of the poor. Although the resources at our disposal are limited, experience has shown that the improvement we could bring about in the shelter conditions of our countries through realistic policies is considerable. We should not therefore underestimate the potential benefits that could be derived through realistic policies and programmes, change of attitudes, measures of selective intervention and structural and institutional improvements. At the same time the priority assigned to housing should be increased, as an investment in housing could itself make a significant contribution to the achievement of the development goals. Adequate shelter must be viewed not as an objective, but as a means of economic and social development.

We should also seek to break new ground during these years, by integrating the programmes for improved shelter, with other programmes designed to improve public well-being such as

health, education, agriculture, small industries and employment. Lack of adequate shelter has repercussions of not inconsequential proportions on other programmes of social and economic development which are undertaken to enhance man's well-being. Unless decent and affordable shelter is provided concomitantly with better opportunities of employment, health and education, the basis and goals of other development efforts will be undermined. It is therefore, necessary to invest our programmes with all these ingredients.

The programmes designed to improve the shelter of the poor should not move parallel to other programmes in this field. They should converge. We should be alive to this fact and be quick to recognise that these objectives stand together. They cannot be pursued in isolation or realised in fragments.

All programmes aimed at improving the condition of the poor should be progressively interwoven and pursued as an interegral part of overall strategies.

Excellencies, the main task that lies ahead of us during these preparatory years, is to secure a political commitment at every level to the attainment of these objectives. We should during these years, strive to assign to the problems of shelter and neighbourhoods, the priority they deserve, both in the formulation of policies as well as in the allocation of resources. This is not all. We should also develop better and innovative policies which would make the delivery of shelter more effective within the constraints of our economies. Thirdly, they should also be pursued as an integral part of overall national development strategies. During the next few years we should seek to coerce, convince, persuade and encourage the politicians, policy makers and others who influence the policy and decision-making process, to move in this direction. The extent to which we succeed in this task, will be the test of our advocacy.

Mr. Chairman, I also consider it our duty, as member nations, to formulate on this occasion, action-oriented programmes, which translate the spirit and purpose of the UN Resolution. The form and substance of some of our programmes designed to assist the poor could also be improved particularly in the field of shelter to enable the benefits of these programmes to reach the poor. Our concern during these years, should therefore, be focused on the development of a set of realistic, replicable and practical solutions to the problems of shelter for the poor. In this context, I wish to make a brief illustration of the initiatives made in my country in the shelter programmes which would form the

basis of the programme of activities connected with the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

The census of 1981 in Sri Lanka has revealed that during the period 1971-1981, we have housed our people more rapidly than the growth of population, in better quality structures. The increase of the population during this period has been 17.0 per cent while the number of occupied housing has increased by more than 26.8 per cent. The percentage of permanent housing has also increased from 25.4 per cent to 41.8 per cent while that of the semi-permanent and improvised stock has decreased correspondingly.

Since 1978, the government has tried to respond forcefully to the need for housing through a variety of programmes. During this period housing was brought to the forefront and was identified as one of the three lead projects of the first Medium Term Investment Plan of the present Government. We assigned higher priority to this activity and declared our resolution to build 100,000 houses during the period. As a result, the transfer of resources to this sub-sector recorded a massive increase and the intensity of the activity has increased several-fold.

The programme had several well-defined elements. In order to alleviate the urban housing shortage a programme for the construction of 36,000 houses in urban areas, mainly for the low income group, was inaugurated. The Government also inaugurated the construction of 50,000 houses in rural areas of the country on a Self-Help basis. At the same time, a novel programme for the establishment of Model Villages was also launched, and as a result the target of 100,000 houses exceeded.

The Model Villages Programme is an attempt to evolve a comprehensive approach to village re-awakening in which the improvement of shelter was attempted together with economic, social and moral upliftment of the people. They were meant to act as rural growth centres which could have a catalytic effect on the general economy and social upliftment of the rural masses.

The Slum & Shanty Upgrading Programme, which has been designed to improve the low-income neighbourhoods in the urban environment, is another programme that has captured the imagination of the people. The programme aims at improving the habitat of the urban poor at a minimum cost. The primary aim is the motivation of the people through measures designed to provide security of tenure and housing finance to improve their own shelter. It is proposed to expand this programme further in the coming years based on our experience during its initial phase of implementation.

During the past five years our programme of housing development was buffeted by the winds of global inflation. But inflation was a blessing in disguise. It made us to think innovatively on many aspects of housing development. We experimented with the use of building materials. We resurrected the ancient building culture of our people and made it relevant to modern needs.

All this has encouraged the Government to revitalise its housing policy. Financial stringency compels us to ensure that we spend our monies as effectively as possible. What is spent must be cost effective.

Our success in the implementation of the First Five Year Programme has inspired us to trust our people and advance in that path. Our next programme is to assist our people to build one million houses. This is a clear advance from the old. It is also radically different from the old in many respects.

In the past the State had to intervene heavily in housing. The State had to be the trail blazer in order to activate a dormant sector. Today we have the opportunity to move forward more sensitively to a programme designed to reach far greater numbers than before, at a lesser cost.

Shelter and neighbourhood improvement is an area where participation between the people and the State have to be carefully designed. Housing is an extremely personal and creative action. Independence and involvement of the user, the house builders, has to be at the maximum. We have therefore developed a fresh approach to the subject of housing and human settlements. In our new Programme, the families that will use the houses, occupy the pivotal position. Key decisions regarding cost, technology, standards, infrastructure, lay-out and environment will be taken solely by them.

The concept of minimal intervention which we are advocating in our new programme, is more subtle than the kind of maximal intervention that we had in the past. We need to use new strategies to reach the larger numbers we are going to work with in the future. We have to get close to the people both in body and spirit. We therefore propose to decentralise the new programme and shift our focus to the Gramodaya Mandalyas – an organisation of village level leaders – which will operate and link with the smallest unit in the administrative hierarchy.

We also propose to undertake a demonstration project for the integration of information and training in low-income shelter programmes with the assistance of the UNCHS and the Government of the Netherlands. It is expected that the project will help to develop a replicable model for the improvement of

information and training in the implementation of low-income shelter programmes, which would be of benefit even to other countries. We hope to be able to disseminate and review the results of this demonstration project in time for the International year.

I trust these initiatives taken in Sri Lanka would inspire other member countries to take innovative measures which would realistically address the problems related to shelter and neighbourhood concerning the poor. I also wish to take this opportunity to invite the Member Nations and the Donor Agencies to make generous contributions in support of the programmes that would be designed for implementation by the UNCHS during the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

I thank you.

“Shelter- A Basic and Universal Need”

*Address by the Hon. R. Premadasa, M.P., Prime Minister of
Sri Lanka at the Eighth Session of the United Nations
Commission on Human Settlements held in Kingston, Jamaica,
on 29th April, 1985*

*Distinguished Delegates,
Mr. Chairman,*

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As we assemble here today for this meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, it is both my duty and my pleasure to express appreciation to our hosts, the Prime Minister and the Government of Jamaica and the City of Kingston. The warmth and graciousness of their welcome lightens the heavy tasks on our agenda.

At the outset, it is useful to remember that this is the eighth session of our Commission. The regularity of our meetings, several of which I have participated in personally, and the progress we have made testifies to our collective commitment to provide adequate shelter for people everywhere on our planet. We have done much – and yet there is so much to be done.

Today, I would like to use this opportunity, which you have so generously given me, to share some thoughts with you on three areas of concern to those of us associated with the work of human settlements: the approach of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, the lessons we have learned from our own experiences in Sri Lanka, and proposals and programmes for the years ahead.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SHELTER

In 1980, at the 35th General Assembly of the United Nations, Sri Lanka called for the designation of an International Year assigned to advance the idea of shelter for the homeless. In my address on that occasion, I said:

“Each of us, in our own way, is attempting to tackle these formidable problems in the Third World. It is my belief that housing provides a key to the solution of several of these disabilities. The problem of housing..... is a global problem. I, therefore, call for the declaration of an International Year... perhaps, the year may be specially focused on the rehabilitation of the shanty dweller”.

The international community, regardless of political and other differences, were almost unanimous in their acceptance of this proposal. And so, the year 1987 became the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. Reports from many member States of the United Nations indicated the wide enthusiasm with which this proposal was received. In fact, the declaration of this International Year has been referred to as a beacon of hope for the under-privileged.

We are virtually on the eve of the International Year, which is less than two years away. All Nations represented here are now

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mobilizing their resources in order to participate in the action programmes which are a major segment of the objectives of the International Year. Extensive consultations and the formulation of strategies have taken place. Considerable investments in time, effort and materials have been expended.

As it has evolved, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless has become a comprehensive activity which reflects the first general principle adopted by Habitat : "the improvement of the quality of life of human beings is the first and most important objective of every human settlement policy." Distinguished Delegates, the International Year is not simply a construction or re-construction programme –it is now part of a larger moral crusade. We are not investing in houses, we are investing in humanity. We are not organizing architecture, we are enriching the architecture of life.

Our efforts are especially relevant for the people of the so-called Third World. The great Asian Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, wrote : "There rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost." This is where our objectives can be best realized. It is here, that we can give real substance to the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

As we reflect on the International Year, here and in other forums, let me also give a word of warning. Let the International Year, in 1987, not be a mere symbolic lipservice to its goals. It must be the onset of a co-ordinated long-term approach – a starting-point, not an end in itself. This is the only way in which it will succeed. And we dare not fail. The future of so substantial a part of humanity is at stake in our venture, and so is the credibility of the international community.

THE SRI LANKA EXPERIENCE

Success in our objectives for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless will depend, to a significant extent, on our overall economic development strategies. The traditional process of development planning does not appear to have accorded the shelter sector the high recognition it deserves. Conventional thinking has tended to place priority on agriculture or industrial advancement. We must nurture the idea that shelter, like food and employment, is a basic and universal need. The results of such an approach are almost immediately visible.

In this context, Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Delegates, allow me, with some patriotic pride, to share elements of the Sri

Lankan experience with you. When our Government took office in 1977, we faced a serious shortage of housing units and a depletion of the national shelter stock. In response to this urgency, we developed a national five-year shelter programme which had two essential goals :

- * Mobilization of all national resources available with a focus on both quantity and quality
- * The construction of 100,000 houses in the 1977 -1982 period

The completion of this effort was achieved well within our time-frame. Inspired by this success, we launched the One Million Houses Programme in March 1983. I am happy to report to you that this activity, perhaps unprecedented in its scope and its relationship to population size (Sri Lanka's population is only about 16 million), is currently encouragingly on target.

The facts and the figures of our National Human Settlement Policy are probably of direct interest largely to us in Sri Lanka. However, the lessons we learned from this experience could have some relevance to other developing nations. We learned, among other things, that:

- i the best programmes are those where the State aids, but the maximum decision-making role is in the hands of the potential house occupant ;
- ii house-building is values building. It reinforces the family ties and the social stability which are so important a part of the social cohesion of traditional Nations;
- iii decentralized Local Government was the key to effective resource mobilization. And so, we shifted our focus to the Gramodaya Mandalaya – the Village level people's unit – as the basic unit of development activity;
- iv forces of energy, which would perhaps otherwise flow into less useful activities, can be channelled into house-building in a most creative way through participative programmes;
- v the traditional rental concept is becoming irrelevant and direct ownership or the prospect of ownership is a vital dynamic in energizing people. The dignity of ownership is a powerful contribution to human dignity;
- vi both quality and quantity can be compatible and our One Million Houses Programme now further emphasizes quality;
- vii the urban drift, a serious problem of human geography in many Nations, can be reduced significantly through effective rural housing programmes. Our Village Re-awakening Movement, begun in 1978, is a remarkably effective rural development effort because of our shelter programmes.

Above all, there were insights for us in Government. We learned that we can learn a great deal from those who constitute the most deprived segment of society. And we, ourselves, are now much closer and more responsive to those whom we have to serve. The broadbased fallout in every area of community development has generated a result that all responsible Governments cherish : growth through self-development.

In Sri Lanka, we have now embarked on our next phase. As I mentioned earlier, this involves building one million houses. As important, it involves teaching the arts of maintenance and ongoing care. Although we currently suffer from some unfortunate terrorist violence, much of it emanating from outside our Nation, our people continue to pursue the national shelter programme with resolution and we are constantly learning in this process.

THE FUTURE

In Sri Lanka, our experience has made us aware of the critical importance of settlements policy in development efforts. We are anxious to learn from and contribute to settlements programmes and technologies in other regions of the so-called Third World. More than any other part of our world, we in the developing Nations, have an urgent need in this area. It is a need that can only be met from our own experience. We may have to import capital, but this is one area in which a pooling of local technologies and a sharing of both mistakes and achievements can enhance our collective prospect.

We have to forge our own paths to development. History tells us that Nations, like individuals, cannot reach greatness as carbon copies of other great Nations. Philosophies and technologies of development, including the forms and the substance of settlements, are now largely scattered into discrete segments. We need to integrate them into a cohesive package applicable to the poorer Nations of the world. Our richness of tradition and culture must be complemented with material advances.

The approach of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless gives us an opportunity to focus our activities and to construct policies and institutions for the future. Mindful of this situation and of our historical circumstances, I would like to present three tentative suggestions for your consideration.

First, I would like to propose the establishment of Regional Working Groups on Settlements, Technology and Education. Each Group could study and test settlements technology,

materials and ideas appropriate to the culture and geography of their region. If we could have, eventually, several field institutes experimenting with innovative and inexpensive materials and equipment, the benefits would be far beyond the relatively modest investment required. Such Working Groups could also develop settlements education efforts—vital instructional efforts on maintenance, what ownership entails, on the provision of common services. We must not only build, we must also study and educate.

My second proposal concerns financing. The primary area in which so-called Third World Nations need assistance in their settlements efforts is with capital. Let us consider the feasibility of a global housing and shelter bank which will channel International resources into local programmes, and place funding and repayments on a sound financial foundation. If we are persuasive enough, and our moral case is unquestionable, we can perhaps procure a small percentage of global arms expenditures into this Institution. To build for and in peace is surely more creative than to produce for destruction. Let us begin with an appeal that one percent of military outlays be diverted for housing. Posterity will bless our efforts. I urge that this Commission on Human Settlements examine this proposal closely.

Any financial proposal concerns the outcome of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. As we prepare for the activities that will commence in 1987, let us try to agree on two clear targets that will be central to the Year and provide the framework for future global settlements policy.

The first target concerns an accelerated International programme of building settlements. I believe that, it is important to have targets against which we can measure performance. As we plan for the International Year, we should obtain pledges from Nations involved—pledges of the number of settlements they are planning for the next decade. In this way, we can develop long-range forecasts and develop global strategies. The Government of Sri Lanka is prepared to make its pledge at any International gathering assembled for this purpose and is further prepared to submit annual statements of fulfilment. We urge other Nations to consider this approach.

A second target concerns institutionalization. There are, within the United Nations system, specialized agencies or institutions for almost every type of development activity—agriculture, food, industry, population, trade, labour, environment, health, financing and others. The International

Year provides us with an opportunity to establish an International agency with the special objective of promoting shelter and allied activities. Such an organization could eventually subsume the Regional Working Groups proposed by me earlier. It will formalize many of the functions of this Commission and other groups whose activities in the area of settlements may not be fully co-ordinated or supervised. As of now, it is our intention to propose such an institution, when we commemorate the International Year in 1987. Distinguished Delegates, I take this occasion to acquaint you with our intention and to invite you to co-sponsor and plan for this permanent commitment to our future in shelter.

*Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,*

I come, as most of you do, from a country which has an ancient heritage and a rich tradition. Among our most cherished legacies is an appreciation of human development.

Our great spiritual leader, the Lord Buddha, consistently spoke of the human condition and the need for its advancement. As a believer in the Buddhist way of life, I strongly feel that one of the most moral and the noblest contributions that we can make to human society and well-being is in providing shelter for all. Yet, this is not a Buddhist goal alone. All great traditions—religions, philosophic, secular—embrace this point of perception. If all of us can establish a commonality on this area, we can use it to build towards an era in which peace will predominate and development will replace destruction. This is a moral crusade for our time.

It is in this spirit of universality that I thank you for your invitation to address this session and wish your deliberations success.

**“If we want to make
the United Nations
work, we must work
at
making the
United Nations.”**

*Address by the Hon. R. Premadasa, M.P., Prime Minister of Sri
Lanka at the 40th Anniversary Session of the United Nations
General Assembly on 22nd October, 1985*

Mr. President,

We are meeting to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the birth of the United Nations. On this occasion, it is both symbolic and appropriate that you preside at this General Assembly. The recuperative capacity and the endurance of your Nation – Spain – encourages us all. Sri Lanka welcomes your elevation to chair our deliberations.

Distinguished Delegates,

The United Nations Charter represents the highest ideals of mankind. By design, accident or coincidence, the United Nations Charter enshrines seven conditions of communal stability and prosperity promulgated by Lord Buddha a little over 2,500 years ago. These seven conditions are known as Saptā Aparihaniya Dhamma – the seven noble principles to prevent deterioration and decline. A nation which follows them will prosper rather than tumble into the precipice of decline. It advocates –

harmonious assembly,
peaceful consultation,
negotiated compromise,
recognition of values and traditions,
adherence to moral and spiritual principles,
upholding the honour and wisdom of elders, and
the free movement of peoples between realms.

As a nation committed to these noble principles, we in Sri Lanka, hold the United Nations in high esteem. I bring with me greetings and good wishes of His Excellency J. R. Jayewardene, President and the people of Sri Lanka.

Today, mankind is caught up in a maze of confusion, controversy and confrontation. We are living amidst forces of hope and despair. Technology has offered our world material benefits of unprecedented magnitude. We are delicately balanced on the edge of the dreadful abyss; a vast uncharted depression inhabited by the shadows of nuclear holocaust, senseless violence and mass starvation. Yet, these shadows conceal a greater and more frightening truth; that we ourselves are the architects of these fearful prospects.

Mr. President,

What has gone wrong? Have we failed to harmonise our material prosperity with moral fortitude? Aren't we blessed by Mother Nature with sufficient resources to meet the needs of the entirety of mankind on this planet? Once Frank Buchman said that there is enough in the world for everybody's need, but not

for everybody's greed. He asked, "If everybody cared enough and everybody shared enough, wouldn't everybody have enough?" Isn't this true? It is Lord Buddha who expounded the Universal Truth that the root cause of all sorrow and all fear is greed. Even though we have got together as a World Body, are we caring for and sharing with each other? Isn't this the crisis we are facing today? If so, isn't this crisis moral rather than economic? If we resolve the moral crisis, will not the economic crisis resolve by itself?

Distinguished Delegates,

Throughout the history of the United Nations, humanity has lived under the dreadful shadow of the rapidly increasing nuclear mechanisms of destruction and the conventional arms race. The destructive capacity of the nuclear arsenals are estimated to be six thousand times that of all the fire power of the Second World War. Global military expenditures are rapidly approaching US \$ 1,000 billion annually. It is indeed a miracle that the world has been spared of the misery and the near total destruction of a Third World War. The full credit for this must go to the United Nations.

I need not over-emphasise the immorality of the colossal expenditure on armaments in a world with scarce resources that is yearning for development and human survival. Beyond the elemental wrongness of these outlays are three derivative concerns. They are the fatality of weapons accumulation, the concentration of destructive power in the hands of a few nations and the diversion of scarce resources and talents into the industry of death. All these could result in the extinction of human life and add to human deprivation. Mahatma Gandhi expressed this in the following words:

"Bombs will not be destroyed by counter bombs, even as violence cannot be destroyed by counter violence".

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

We, at the General Assembly, have a unique opportunity to remind the nuclear superpowers of their special responsibility for the arms race and of their fundamental obligations for peace. Within a few days, the leaders of the United States of America and the Soviet Union will be meeting in Geneva. It is not our desire to intrude on bilateral discussions. However, to the extent that these discussions also affect our lives, it is imperative that the voice of all peace loving states be heard – and heard clearly.

Distinguished Delegates,

Let us not miss this opportunity. Let us resolve here and now – firmly and clearly to present a Special Emergency Resolution to President Reagan and Secretary Gorbachev – Let us by resolution appeal that they,

**Recognize the most volatile situation faced by the superpowers and the benefits that will accrue to themselves and the whole of mankind by diverting such military outlays to peaceful and humanitarian efforts,*

**Agree to a reduction of military expenditure by ten percent each year for five consecutive years beginning 1986/87,*

**Apply a significant portion of the resources so conserved towards the reduction of the International Debt of the poorer nations.*

Let us accept these resolutions with minimum debate and maximum support. Let us empower the Secretary General to carry this message to Geneva and report to us on its reception. I appeal to all peace loving member-states to join me in the passage of this urgent motion for peace.

What we seek is not merely the release of around US \$ 60 billion for annual debt relief. What we want is an investment to safeguard and improve life. What we offer is the beginning of a new global pact between those who have resources and those who represent the political and commercial market places of the future. What we demand is an end to a system where the security of the many is hostage to the ambitions of a few.

To the leaders of the superpowers we say this: do not make your consideration or acceptance of our proposal conditional on mutual reciprocity. Have the courage to break the escalating cycle of the arms race. What you may lose militarily you will gain in the goodwill of the peoples and the nations around the world. And goodwill is a greater source of strength than armaments; a greater incentive for commerce and investment than bombs; a greater bond of political friendship than security pacts.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

Forty years ago, when the United Nations was conceived, the definition of international violence was largely restricted to conventional forms of war. In recent times, new malignancies have expanded that definition.

The twin problems of terrorism and drug abuse have emerged as the two scourges of our times. It is a sad commentary on our times that these two scourges are intertwined and mutually supportive.

Terrorism, which has made life insecure for many a peace loving nation, goes hand in hand with the transport and promotion of narcotics and dangerous drugs. These in turn are nurtured and nourished by the arms trade.

Distinguished Delegates,

Today we live in an age of international terrorism, where aggression entirely within the boundaries of a Nation-State is often inspired and sustained by external networks of support. Hijackings, political murders, destruction of life and property with the declared goal of destabilising legitimate governments, are now regular occurrences. Open societies which cherish individual liberties are particularly vulnerable and are most easily threatened by acts of terrorism.

We, in Sri Lanka, speak from the forum of our own sad experience. A small group of terrorists who believe in the bullet and not the ballot and have secured shelter outside our borders, have caused immeasurable harm to innocent men, women and children. They have desecrated shrines, murdered priests and nuns, students and teachers, the sick and the aged. Scarce resources have had to be diverted from vitally needed development projects to ill-affordable security purposes. Each and every significant political party be they of the government or the opposition have condemned terrorism – and yet it persists.

We agree fully with our Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar when he recently said:

“As a human being I have a feeling of shame. I think that what the terrorists are doing all over the world is not only a crime, but also an act of cowardice.”

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to propose the following steps to wipe out the terrorist menace from this globe:

- *Let us resolve that an International Conference on Terrorism be convened with a view to formulating an International Plan of Action to eliminate terrorism from this globe.
- *Let us join together in the true spirit of liberty, equality and justice, pool our resources and take collective action through the establishment of an International Agency committed to the total eradication of terrorism.

Mr. President,

Stark poverty with its manifold consequences continues to haunt a major section of mankind. Hunger and disease aggravated by natural catastrophes have plunged entire populations into untold misery. Millions of people without the

minimum means of livelihood and without adequate food and shelter await redress.

You are aware that a large portion of the time and energy of the United Nations has been focused on leading issues in the areas of Economic Development and Equity. We are now at the mid-point of the Third Development Decade. More than ten years ago, and earlier General Assembly called for the creation of a new International Economic Order. The high optimism of those times has given way to a sense of despair as results have been painfully slow in coming forth. Many nations, especially the poorer ones, have stagnated or even retarded rather than progressed in recent years.

There are many reasons for this sustenance of backwardness. Flow of capital has been limited. Industrial goods have cost more. Industrial markets have contracted. Currencies have fluctuated wildly. High technology has reduced the comparative advantages of labour. Access to major markets for goods is threatened through growing protectionism. Commodity prices have been unfavourable. This bleak economic landscape is darkened by the dominance of recession throughout the world for more than a decade.

Mr. President,

Smaller and poorer countries like mine feel these blows with extreme severity. We do not have a cushion of financial reserves to soften our economic hardships. The cumulative result is that the Third World faces a grave danger: the danger of economic re-colonization. We are threatened with the loss of our independence through the loss of control over our economic destiny.

Distinguished Delegates,

Several conditions contribute heavily to this dependent situation. The debt burden of the poor countries is well in excess of US \$ 800 billion. The debtor nations are not in a position to honour interest payments let alone amortization of capital. These countries have three alternatives – enforcement of extreme austerity, unilateral collective default or mutually agreed rescheduling of obligations.

Mr. President,

We see a major rescheduling of obligations as the most effective and fair response. However, such a rescheduling should be part of an overall global economic adjustment.

*Let us resolve to appeal to all rich countries to treat this as a matter of grave urgency,

*Let this accommodation include reconsideration of interest rates, increasing the grant component of assistance, organization of new capital flows, stabilization of commodity prices and currencies, and guaranteed access to markets.

Mr. President,

Five years ago, when I addressed the 35th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, I proposed the Declaration of an International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. This proposal has since been accepted by the world community and the Year 1987 has been dedicated for this purpose.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

When some people speak of housing and shelter, they tend to give a restrictive interpretation greatly underestimating its real benefits. To them housing and shelter mean only a mere roof above their heads. This is a misconception. Housing not only provides protection from the elements but also shelters all the factors that go to improve the quality of life of individuals, who form the families. Families make up societies and societies build up to nations. Nations finally constitute the global community. That is why I consider housing to be not only a basic human need but also a key to human development. In essence, housing is central to the fulfilment of man's aspirations for a better life.

Health and sanitation, agriculture, industry, employment, water supply and environmental quality – all these factors which go to improve man's living conditions undergo qualitative changes with housing development. In this manner, housing will provide the initiative and drive for total development – both physical and human.

Addressing the 8th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements held in Kingston, Jamaica in April 1985, I appealed to the World Community to consider the establishment of a global Housing and Shelter Bank which will channel international resources into local programmes and place funding and payments on a sound financial foundation. I appealed that one percent of military outlays be diverted for housing.

On the eve of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless 1987 :—

- * Let us rededicate ourselves to the cause of shelter,
- * Let us canvass steadily for the establishment of a global Housing and Shelter Bank for the benefit of the millions who

have no roofs over their heads especially in the developing countries.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

The actual accomplishments of the United Nations have been considerable, but they are not enough. Many brave and skilful men and women, led by five dedicated Secretaries-General, have served this organization well. Yet, overall performance measured against the expectations and the possibilities has been, from our viewpoint, less than satisfactory.

Many point out that this institution is only as strong as the collective commitment of all its members. Others claim that law without the capacity for enforcement is enfeebling. Some perceive the imperfections and limitations of our Charter and call for its revision. Most observers criticise a groaning and overlapping bureaucracy in which the means have overtaken the ends and the establishment has swallowed the objectives. Several smaller member-states believe that the presence of the veto is both undemocratic and allows for obstruction of majority views.

There are significant elements of accuracy in each of these assertions. If we are to make the United Nations a more effective working body, member-states must address these shortcomings. Yet in many ways, these are symptoms of a deeper affliction. I believe that a more correct perception of the protractive and stagnating tendencies that characterize the United Nations is that its problems arise primarily from a lack of leadership.

For many years, the Heads of Government of member-states have allowed a devaluation of the United Nations to occur. Diplomatic representation, however competent, is no substitute for the personal presence and active involvement of those who lead national administrations. If the United Nations is to realise its full potential, power must reinforce diplomacy.

Mr. President,

* I propose that each year,
on the eve
of the General Assembly,
an informal and closed session
of heads of government take place.

Such meetings, if developed into a regular tradition, can examine the most critical items before the General Assembly and arrive at some concensus. A review of the operations of the

United Nations itself could become a feature of these gatherings. In this way, leaders with national decision-making authority will bring that authority to the level of international decision-making. If we want to make the United Nations work, we must work at making the United Nations. I urge that the Secretary-General soon convene a small group of qualified persons to examine the feasibility of implementing this proposal.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

The pathway to the future presents us with the same choice that the world had in 1945 – the choice between life and death. If the trend of the past is the destiny of the future, we may survive but we will not prevail. If we have the moral determination to engage in self-examination, we can overcome our flaws and expand our vision. Then, we can supplement our knowledge with the wisdom that leads us to an age of peace and prosperity.

We at the United Nations must strive hard and rededicate ourselves – “to the creation of a World in which rich nations help developing ones and big nations do not bully small ones” – as eloquently expressed by Richard Livingstone.

Those of us who are in search of Truth and Non-Violence, find refuge in the teachings of the Great Gautama the Buddha. The life and the thought of the Enlightened One evoke a blessing that is particularly appropriate for our occasion and which I share with you.

Sabbé Sattā Bhavantu Sukhitattā
May all beings be well and happy.

“Housing Development an Investment in Mankind”

*Address by the Hon. R. Premadasa, M.P., Prime Minister of
Sri Lanka at the Ninth Session of The United Nations
Commission on Human Settlements held in Istanbul
on 5th May, 1986*

*Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,*

It is most appropriate that we hold this Ninth Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements in the historic city of Istanbul. This fabled city reminds us of a theme so important for human settlements. The culture of the past must intermingle with the dynamism of modernity if we are to give a meaning and a sense of civilizational value to the shelters we create today. For this lesson in environmental philosophy and for your legendary hospitality, we must express our appreciation to the Government and the people of the Republic of Turkey and the administration of the city of Istanbul.

Distinguished Delegates,

You will recall at the 35th General Assembly of the United Nations in 1980, Sri Lanka called for the designation of an International Year devoted to the cause of shelter for the homeless. This proposal, with the almost unanimous support of the international community, has crystallized into the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless - 1987.

We are now on the threshold of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. A great deal of work has been undertaken, both by this Commission and other United Nations agencies and by national governments, in preparation for the International Year. In fact, it is correct to say that the International Year has been a catalyst for a series of efforts at the local, national and international levels. It is not often that we can say that one international effort, centred around a commemorative year, has produced immediate results. Already, in advance of the inauguration of the International Year of Shelter, we can claim that our preliminary work has benefited thousands of our fellow-citizens on this planet. And, the dream must not die - it must be sustained into the future.

As important as these practical and material measures, all of which are so necessary for the success of our programmes, is the advancement of a new approach to development. Traditionally, the cutting-edge of Third World development has concerned itself with industrial enterprise and agricultural productivity. Our experience with shelter suggest that the conventional philosophy of development needs to be enhanced so as to incorporate the concept of shelter within its fundamental priorities.

In developing nations, the binding links of family, home and hearth retain a strong influence and exert a primal claim on the emotions of people. No amount of development outside the

home can equal or compensate for development of the home and in the home. We must, of course, have industrialisation and agrarian progress. But surely the most basic lesson of the past decade is that development of the home is the taproot of all development.

We have seen, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, the results of people's participation in home building. It has inculcated the pride of ownership, the discipline of maintenance, and the sharing of common services. In this process a spirit of co-operation and diligence has entered the mainstream of economic life. These qualities, created in and around the home, are swiftly transmitted to the workplace and replicate themselves there. In both a personal and social sense, nation-building seems to be most effective when lodged in a programme of home-building. This is a lesson which many development planners have to appreciate.

Yet, this is, in many ways, our theme for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The International Year is not simply a year of construction. Nor is it a year of planning more dwellings or a year of expanding constructed units. It has to be and it is, something more than that.

The International Year gives us an opportunity to lay aside, at least in the area of human settlements, the divisive issues of ideologies, political systems, armaments and economic disparities. It allows us to prove that the global community of nations can work together and can learn from each other in at least one area. And if we can prove this, as indeed we are beginning to do, then it is surely possible to extend this co-operation to other areas of human concern.

In even its most specific charge, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless embraces so many of the aspirations of developing nations and peoples that to fail will be an indictment against us all. Last year, in Jamaica, I reminded the Eighth Session of this forum that the International year is not simply a construction or re-construction programme. It is now, more than ever, part of a larger moral crusade. If our preparations are not matched with a co-ordinated long-term approach and a vigorous implementation effort, we will be unable to fulfil the expectations which are demanded of us. This is not the time for half-measures or symbolic lip-service.

It is in this context, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to share some experiences and make some proposals to the Distinguished Delegates here. On other occasions, at earlier sessions of the United Nations Commission on Human

Settlements, I have made reference to our housing programmes in Sri Lanka.

When our Government assumed office in 1977, we were confronted with a totally inadequate housing situation. A major construction effort was initiated to add 100,000 new houses during the period 1977-1983. We mobilized resources on an almost emergency basis and exceeded this target by 53,000 units well within our time objective. However, this was not enough. Population growth, attrition of existing stock, and the higher aspirations of our citizens required much more than we had provided.

And so, in January 1984, we began the One Million Houses Programme. In relation to our population of about 16 million in Sri Lanka, we have perhaps the most ambitious settlements effort in the developing world. It is with great pleasure, and some nationalistic pride, that I can report to you that this programme continues encouragingly to meet its goals.

Last year, I shared with the Distinguished Delegates some of the lessons we had learned from the early days of the One Million Houses Programme. In the past year, we continued to learn more. We have found that continuing devolution of responsibility to the lower levels of local government enhances the impact of our policies. We have confirmed our belief that mobilization of human energies is primary and that capital support, although vital, is less significant than commitment.

We have further developed our Low Income Shelter Package to provide a flexibility of choice at a minimal cost—the average cost of a loan for a rural family dwelling is US \$ 210 and for an urban family dwelling it is US \$ 325. We have noted the continued urge for self-reliance and community participation and its expression not only in the construction of shelter, but in the maintenance of dwellings. All these experiences we will be glad to share with other nations or agencies that would like to examine our National Human Settlements Policy.

This programme, perhaps un-paralleled in its scope and content, is based on our conviction that housing is an investment in mankind itself. It is a programme where people themselves have been made the key resource — the central factor in the programme. We placed our faith on the self-reliance of the people. We were, therefore, able to re-discover and re-confirm the primacy of the human factor with the human being as the key resource. The other resources, particularly money, though important and necessary, have become secondary.

Our Million Houses Strategy has given a new meaning and dimension to the provision of shelter. It has released the creative energies of the people. It has harnessed the hitherto hidden innovative resources among the many people — both rural and urban. It has, at the same time, noticeably achieved much human satisfaction. It has invested in and transformed people to be their own development agents. But to me, the most significant achievement has been that through this experience, shelter development has again proved to be central to overall development. Shelter development has built up pride in self and the family — the pride of ownership — throughout our villages and towns. It has become an investment in social and political stability. It has, in addition, unleashed renewed efforts in self-reliance and community participation.

In its own way, perhaps the most significant part of our experience is that it has been implemented despite the most negative physical conditions. International economic trends have placed budgetary constraints on development funds.

International terrorism, coming from and encouraged from outside our borders, make for security problems. However, the enthusiasm of our people has enabled performance under duress. It seems to me, at this moment in global affairs, that we will all have to find methods of development which can be undertaken in circumstances of tension and stress. It is through the creation of these methods and the mobilization of popular support for development that we will ultimately be able to defeat those who seek to destroy stability and freedom within our nations.

*Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,*

In my address to the Eighth Session of this Commission on 29 April, 1985, I briefly outlined a few tentative proposals which I suggested we consider as part of our effort for the International Year. We have now developed these proposals further and I would like to submit four specific concepts for your reflection and early consideration.

First, I would like to suggest the initiation of Regional Research Groups on Settlements, Technology and Education. When this proposal was made last year, several delegates expressed an interest in it. What we envisage is a network of both privately and publicly funded groups working on settlements technology, materials and ideas appropriate to the culture and geography of their region. A relatively small investment in these centres would provide us with innovative

and inexpensive materials and equipment, with educational resources and information on ancillary requirements of settlements. If we look upon settlements as an ongoing task, extending over a period of time, it is essential that we develop centres of study to support our efforts.

Second, I reiterate my proposal for the creation of a global housing and shelter bank. At a time in international affairs when existing capital institutions are under pressure of lending or re-scheduling demand, it is essential that we have a special purpose institution for settlements. This would harness international capital resources, channel them into local programmes and organize funding and repayments on a responsible financial foundation. I have, on past occasions, suggested that we appeal to the global armament stockpilers to divert a minimal amount of their expenditures from war to peace through contributions to such a fund or bank. But, before we can begin an appeal we must have an institution. It would be a fitting memorial to the International Year if we could initiate this venture in 1987.

My third proposal, also made in outline last year, concerns the acceleration of settlement building. During the International Year, we could create an accelerated pledging programme through which nations could enhance their commitments to building shelter. This pledge to the international community could extend over a decade and we could then measure performance against promise. Today, the global shelter effort is somewhat ill-defined and confined largely to separate national efforts. By creating an international pledging system we can achieve several objectives — establish targets and measure performance globally, allocate global resources in a most effective way, create a system of international accountability, and develop long-range forecasts and strategies for the future. We need all of these, if we are to build for the generations yet unborn.

Finally, as we approach the dawn of the International Year, we must not leave our future to happenstance. It is vitally important that the momentum of the International Year be sustained. There are two mutually supporting goals which need to be considered towards this end — a timeframe and an institution. It is both appropriate and timely that we use the International Year to create a specialized agency or institution within the United Nations system for the specific purpose of promoting shelter and allied activities. Such an organization could initiate and co-ordinate a variety of operations in support of shelter programmes around the world. In addition, we should seek to

extend the International Year into the International *Decade* for Shelter for the Homeless. In this way, we could keep the focus of our effort attuned to a timeframe which allows for more realistic implementation of a truly global shelter programme.

Distinguished Delegates, I present these proposals to you in order to share our intentions with you. It is my hope that many of you, especially those who have already encouraged me informally, will join in co-sponsoring these initiatives when they are formally presented. If we are to take our tasks seriously, we must not only engage in our national efforts—we must begin to build the institutions and means by which our commitment to shelter becomes both permanent and internationally effective.

*Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,*

The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless is an unique event. It provides us with an opportunity which may well not come again. It, therefore, imposes a heavy responsibility on all of us.

We come, most of us, from nations who have not enjoyed the benefits of affluence in recent centuries. Our peoples have, often for no reason generated by them, suffered greatly. As public officials all of us hold a public trust. To ease the burden of our fellow-citizens will be the fullest discharge of this trust – and an obligation we owe to the underprivileged with whom we share this planet.

The spiritual and philosophic mentor of my country, the Lord Buddha, enjoined us all to work for “the upliftment of the many”. This is a goal embraced by all progressive thinkers throughout the ages. Some approach it through religion and philosophy, some through revolution, and some through reform. Whatever the means, the end of upliftment is an objective shared by most of us here today. We represent a variety to beliefs, social systems and ideologies, but as long as we have a confluence of end objectives our purposes will be one.

And so, Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Delegates, we join together in our efforts to make the year ahead one of memorable achievement. In this, let us move with the spirit of internationalism, of global unity and community, which you have brought to earlier meetings of this Commission. I thank you for your invitation to address you today. I appreciate the patient hearing you have given me, and I wish your deliberations success.

