



"IF WE WANT TO MAKE THE UNITED NATIONS WORK, WE MUST WORK AT MAKING THE UNITED NATIONS."

— R. PREMADASA  
PRIME MINISTER OF  
SRI LANKA.

22ND OCTOBER 1985



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**ADDRESS OF THE HON. R. PREMADASA, PRIME MINISTER OF SRI LANKA,  
AT THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
22ND OCTOBER, 1985**



**ADDRESS OF THE HON. R. PREMADASA, PRIME MINISTER OF SRI LANKA,  
AT THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
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 Sapta 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

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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.”

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*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 catastrophies 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, an 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,*

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\* *I propose that each year, LIBRARY  
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 consensus. 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,*

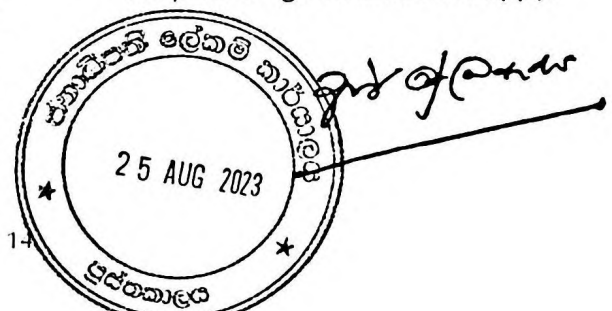
The pathway to the future presents us with the same choice that the world had in 1945 – the choice between life and death. If the trend of the past is the destiny of the future, we may survive but we will not prevail. If we have the moral determination to engage in self-examination, we can overcome our 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.





**THE THIRD WORLD HAS . . .**

More than 78% of the world's people



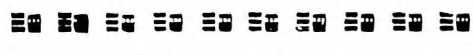
Approximately 10% of the world's GNP



10% of the world's merchant ships



Less than 30% of world trade



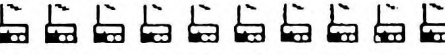
Approximately 12% of the world's railway traffic



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



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



Approximately 37% of the world's reserves



Approximately 8% of world industrial output



- Third World
- Developed Countries



