



41ST COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE
COLOMBO SRI LANKA - 1995



**41 ST COMMONWEALTH
PARLIAMENTARY
CONFERENCE**

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

BY

HER EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

OF THE

**DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF
SRI LANKA**

CHANDRIKA BANDARANAIKE KUMARATUNGA

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8TH OCTOBER '95 BANDARANAIKE MEMORIAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HALL



41st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

*8th October 1995 at the Bandaranaike Memorial
International Conference Hall*

President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association

Hon'ble Members of National, State & Provincial
Legislative Assemblies

Commonwealth Secretary-General

Members of the Foreign Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Invitees

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen

It gives me the greatest pleasure to inaugurate this 41st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. I extend a very warm welcome, on behalf of all Sri Lankans, to those Delegates, Representatives, observers, Officials and their respective Spouses, who have come from abroad, to join their Sri Lankan CPA counterparts on this occasion.

Belief in the Commonwealth ideal, and the practice of parliamentary democracy are so deeply ingrained in the Sri Lankan polity, that hosting a CPA gathering here is both a very natural and happy occasion for us. Sri Lanka has thrice been associated with hosting CPA Conferences. In 1957 in New Delhi, our then Prime Minister, the late S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike joined his Indian and Pakistani counterparts in co-hosting the first Common-

wealth Parliamentary Conference to be held in Asia. Then in 1974, Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike was present at the inauguration by our late President William Gopallawa of the 20th CPA Conference, here in this very same Hall. That occasion was in fact in the nature of a 'house-warming party' for the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference hall - it was the first international conference held in these premises.

It has been customary on such occasions as this, to dwell at some length on the true meaning of our shared Commonwealth bonds, and to delineate the parameters of our shared commitment to the practice of parliamentary democracy. With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I propose to depart somewhat from that tradition, and share with you instead some thoughts about the post-Cold War new world order which confronts us, especially the developing countries of the 3rd World, and to pose the question of how we, in the Commonwealth, might contribute to enhancing peace and development in the world.

This Commonwealth of ours is a quite unique microcosm of the contemporary international community. We comprise a wide variegation of ethnic and linguistic identity. We reflect the widest possible range of political and economic state power: from permanent membership of the UN Security Council and of the G7 to the ranks of least developed countries and small island states. In terms of military power, we count amongst us a major nuclear power and one possessing the fourth largest Army in the world.

Our shared commitment to parliamentary democracy nonetheless allows us wide variation of format -

including both Westminster-type Parliamentary Governments and US-French-type Executive Presidencies. Given the voluntary nature of our association, and the spirit of sympathetic and tolerant understanding which imbues our relations, we have witnessed members leaving us and returning to us: and we have lived with the overthrow of democracy and its restoration, with armed rebellion, challenging not only duly constituted order but the very integrity of the nation, and with its protection through collective action.

We encompass a geographical spread from the Caribbean to the South Pacific. Whilst we recognise and pursue various regional affiliations for socio-economic and even political purposes, we continue to maintain our transcending Commonwealth links. We freely and frankly share views reflecting wide differences of perception concerning world issues, but always endeavour to synthesise and consensualise them to the greatest extent possible. Therefore, if we in the Commonwealth, interacting at the many levels available - governmental, parliamentary, non-governmental and people-to-people - cannot see our way through to identifying commonalities of interest and mutualities of benefit to be derived from this new world order, then the prospects of achieving this within the broader, universal community cannot be deemed to be bright.

I may be forgiven, I hope, if I focus on those salient features of the new world order which bear most directly upon the well-being of the developing countries of the 3rd World, for that is where we belong. And it is upon these countries that the new order has impinged most unfavourably, both politically and economically.

During the Cold War era, political interaction amongst the world's major powers had been stultified, with the

UN Security Council being largely immobilised through veto-power. This had enabled the developing countries not only to take the initiative in the multilateral negotiating process by channelling it to fora such as the UN General Assembly where they enjoyed numerical superiority, but to focus attention on development issues relevant to them.

With the advent of the uni-polar new world order, this has changed. Cooperation amongst the major powers has enabled the re-activation of the UN Security Council for political action, undertaken in the name of peace-keeping. Moreover, given that contemporary conflict has largely to do with internal crises in 3rd World countries, the major powers have been able to set new parameters for their peace-keeping role - such as human rights, and democratic plurality.

Developments in the economic field have worked to this same end. During the Cold War era, the thrust had been towards generating interstate action on aid flows, commodity price stabilization, trade preferences, regulation of technology transfer and the activities of transnational corporations. Today, the global approach to development is coloured by the new philosophy that all is best left to market mechanisms and private initiative. Moreover, domestic action by developing countries is itself sought to be standardized to reflect this, through the leverage of 'conditionality'. Yet again, parameters other than ones of purely economic significance have been introduced: such as environment and development, population, social development, etc. Unlike the earlier agenda which called for common action by developed and developing countries, this new agenda calls for corrective action to be undertaken largely by the developing countries alone, with only marginal support from developed ones.

Even where governments are still perceived as having a role in economic activity, responsibility is being sought to be shifted to international financial institutions in which the influence of developing countries is virtually minimal. Much of the new agenda envisages a role for non-official actors on both the national and international scene. A danger is that the extent of their influence is likely to reflect the degree to which they mirror current thinking of major powers.

I observe that the Theme and Topics identified for this 41st CPA Conference almost entirely reflect this new international agenda. The Theme is: Democracy and Development, and the Topics include Women's Equality, Human Rights, Youth and Development, and sectarian fundamentalism. I do not presume to question the validity of any of this. The focus of my thoughts is how best we, in the developing world should approach the discussion of these matters.

There can be little doubt that today, the differentiation between developing countries themselves has sharply increased. Indeed there are those who now question the very validity of the concept of 'the South'. Yet, commonalities of interest amongst them are clearly discernible. They have a common interest in a well-functioning world economy, and in international co-operation for development. To lesser or greater degree, they are all affected by those elements which bear upon that end: namely, external resource flows, market access, science and technology linkages, terms of trade, debt problems, and so on.

Areas for common action are also readily evident. Meaningful reform of the UN system must rank high amongst their priorities. Today, the inequality within

the global community in terms of political and economic power is so great, that there is a danger of the dominance of the stronger powers becoming synonymous with the concept of the international community. The UN system had been established on the principle of "one country, one vote", and there is need to revert to a proper application of that principle.

Another area of importance for developing countries must be the relationship between the UN and international financial institutions, including especially the Bretton Woods institutions.

Making those institutions more effective in contributing to the development process must surely include reform of their structures to allow developing countries a stronger voice in their decision making.

The timing of your Meeting here now, and the agenda you have set for yourselves, in fact provides for an interesting comparison with the agenda for the 20th CPA Conference, which was last held here. Then, in 1974, you met during the Cold War era. Understandably, your agenda then included such items as the Indian Ocean Peace Zone, problems of peace and security in South-East Asia and other regions, international aid - its scope, form and direction, and the future relationship between the industrialised and primary producing countries with reference to the European Community and other organizations.

There is one matter which did not find mention then, nor does now, but which we in Sri Lanka have had to live with over many years. That concerns violence, political violence whether ascribable to ethnic conflict, anarchic terrorism or any other cause. Its impact in human terms

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has been self-evidently horrendous: but it has also had (an as yet incalculable adverse impact) upon the development process.

I believe it is arguable that, regardless of any contrary seeming overlay to this violence, it is at heart a manifestation of socio-economic deprivation. Hence my pre-occupation with the theme of development: but hence too, the relevance of the theme for your own deliberations - democracy and development. For, leaving aside for a moment the human tragedy which this violence represents, and the incalculable damage done by it to the overall development process, the other grievously endangered element is the democratic process itself.

In this regard, I stand here today to announce to you with pride, the process undertaken by my government, to salvage, rejuvenate and strengthen democracy and parliamentary institutions in Sri Lanka.

In the last quarter of a century, Sri Lanka has seen two terrible youth uprisings, a separatist war, which still continues after 13 years and well nigh two decades of State terror, wielded by an autocratic regime taking refuge beneath a thinly veiled vanner of parliamentary institutions.

I don't need to say how dangerously this impaired the entire network of democratic parliamentary institutions in this country. I take this opportunity to pay homage to my people-whose unswerving dedication and courage to the cause of democracy and human freedom, gave us the strength to persist in our struggle for democracy. It is also an apt demonstration of the strength and vigour of democratic traditions in my country that they have withstood such massive onslaughts directed at their very foundations to finally regain victory through 4 consecutive elections held within a period of 18 months.

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My government stands committed to re-enforcing the legal, administrative and political institutions in a manner that would prevent any further destruction of democracy in this country. We have already achieved much all spheres in this regard, especially in the resolution of the ethnic question and the problem of the minority communities.

We are certain that we will succeed in our endeavours, with the support of the massive majority of all our peoples.

If I may now, in conclusion, complete the circle of my thoughts as suggested at the beginning, I would reiterate the responsibility and the opportunity (we in the Commonwealth have) of contributing to global action in support of both democracy & development. In both those matters, we have a variety of experience; we have a tradition of sympathetic and tolerant understanding of each other's problems and aspirations: and, we have many fora of interaction amongst which, the linkage of Parliamentarians represented in the CPA ranks foremost.

For, if Parliamentary Government is the instrument for the fulfilment of a people's needs and aspirations, then it has to find reflection in the deliberations of their elected representatives. Permit me to express my sincerest good wishes for a most successful Conference. I also wish you a most enjoyable stay in our land, however brief that may be. Rest assured of the warmest welcome, for those amongst you from abroad, at all levels of our society.

President and Hon'ble Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association - I thank you.



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cover Design-

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