



SRI LANKA

Statement

by

H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

at the General Debate of the
66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

United Nations, New York.
23rd September, 2011

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President of the Sixty Sixth Session of the General
Assembly

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate Your Excellency Nassir Abdul Aziz Al-Nasser on your assumption of the Presidency.

I must also congratulate His Excellency Ban Ki-moon warmly on his re-election as Secretary-General and we look forward to working with him constructively.

As we gather here today, it is appropriate to reflect on the values and ideals which inspire the United Nations system. One of the principal attributes is the spirit of flexibility which has always been a feature of the United Nations.

We must acknowledge the need for that spirit of openness and adaptability today, more than at any other time. This is because the foundations of the world order are being transformed dramatically and fundamentally. At the heart of these changes is the need to protect smaller countries in the developing world and to advance their interests vigorously.

In the midst of uncertainty, there are some things which must remain constant. These reflect our esteemed beliefs and convictions. Despite repeated references in this Assembly by many member countries, on the right of the Palestinian people to a State of their own within secure borders, we still have not been able to make it a reality.

It is a matter for profound disappointment that this has not yet happened. There is a window of opportunity now and we must make use of it before it is too late. It is time for decisive action rather than more discussion. This will be in the interest of the security and the well being of the entire region including Israel.

The need for sustained support for countries of the African Continent at this critical time is also worthy of mention.

It is important to remind ourselves that every country cherishes the values and traditions, and deeply held religious convictions it has nurtured over the

centuries. These cannot be diluted or distorted under the guise of human rights, by the imposition of attitudes or approaches which are characteristics of alien cultures.

If this were done, it would amount to a violation of human rights in a fundamental sense. It must also be pointed out that even where sanctions are imposed, extreme care has to be taken to ensure that the people at large are not harmed by such action. I would also express, once again, my solidarity with the people of Cuba and I wish them all success.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

Whilst clash of ideas, opinions and values continues, we have clearly to recognise that dialogue, deliberation and consensus offer the only viable means for resolving differences. The might of powerful nations cannot prevail against justice and fair play.

In the troubled times in which we live, we can derive guidance from the wise words of Gautama the Buddha who advised the Lichchavi Princes, whose energies were being consumed by bitter disputes among them, that the way forward consists of meeting, discussing and departing in an atmosphere of amity and goodwill. This represents the essential spirit of the United Nations, particularly relevant today.

The most significant challenge to stability and progress in the modern world is posed by the menace of terrorism. Recent experience the world over amply demonstrates that inconsistent standards and discriminating approaches can unintentionally give a fresh lease of life to the forces of terror. An explicit and uniform response which refuses to recognize political shades of terrorism, is necessarily required.

Terrorism presents a threat from which not even the wealthiest and most powerful of nations are immune. It must be remembered, as well, that terrorist groups frequently operate under the guise of front organizations. Conferring legitimacy on these has the inevitable effect of providing comfort and encouragement to the merchants of terror.

As the leader of a nation which has paid a heavy price due to terrorism over a quarter of a century, I would underline that we must firmly resolve to rid the

world of terrorism. We need to have solid practical action on the ground, and send out our collective message on this issue, loud and clear universally.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

The interest of the developing world needs to be protected in another significant respect. It is vitally important to insist that the structures and procedures of multilateral organizations are uniform and consistent and devoid of discrimination.

My country has reason for concern with approaches tainted by an unacceptable degree of selectivity, which we have brought to the notice of the organizations in question in recent weeks. The developing world must keep a vigil against these irregular modalities which should be resisted through our collective strength.

After three decades of pain and anguish, today, Sri Lankans of all ethnicities, living in all parts of Sri Lanka, are free from LTTE terror and no longer live in a state of fear.

However, I am deeply mindful that the battle for peace is every bit as important and difficult as the struggle against terror. After the eradication of terrorism, my government has turned its undivided attention to building anew, the foundations of a unified and vibrant nation and drawing upon the inherent strengths of our country and in particular, the unique caliber of our human potential.

It is justifiable for us to be proud of our nation's achievements during the brief span of thirty months which have elapsed since the beginning of the post-conflict phase. The resettlement of more than 95% of internally displaced persons, who constituted the largest number of civilians forcibly held by a terrorist group at any time, while continuing even today to clear the mines laid by terrorists in extensive areas is a proud achievement.

Today, in the Northern Province, the Armed Forces are engaged in development of the infrastructure which were destroyed by the terrorists during a period of three decades. Contrary to malicious propaganda, the numbers of the Armed forces personnel present in the Northern Province is at a minimal level.

Revival of the economy has enhanced incomes and improved livelihoods, ex-combatants and other cadres after exposure to programmes of vocational training and counseling have been re-integrated into society, electoral process has been restored after decades making possible the emergence of a democratic leadership. These are among our valued accomplishments.

The remarkable growth of 22% of the economy of the Northern Province is a clear indication of the success achieved by the government's initiatives with regard to development in that part of the country. The GDP growth of the country has been consistent at 8 percent, unemployment at a record low of 4.5 percent and it is also worthy of mention that in the assessment by the World Economic Forum in its Global Competitiveness Report for 2011 – 2012, Sri Lanka shows dramatic improvement, moving up to 52nd from 79th rank over a span of two years.

It is worthy of note that all these developments have taken place within the brief space of 30 months – an achievement all the more significant because of our strong emphasis on reconciliation. Important as economic development is, we have attached the highest priority to fostering the spirit of inclusivity and removing any remnants of bitterness from the hearts and minds of all our people.

Over the last two years, we have recruited 669 Tamil police officers bringing the total number of Tamil officers to 1143, while plans are afoot to recruit more this year.

After more than two decades, a census is being conducted in the Northern Province as a part of the national census, to provide a firm basis for our initiatives.

As a result of these achievements what we see in Sri Lanka today is a self-reliant nation, with robust hope for the future, and a strong economy, strengthened by inward investment flows, unprecedented expansion of tourism and significant growth of volumes of international trade.

Towards consolidation of these trends, leaving behind us, the trauma of the past, we ask of the international community the hand of friendship and goodwill, based on understanding of our nation's determination to confront with courage the challenge of a new era in our history.

We ask our friends in distant lands to drop pre-conceived notions. We strongly believe in home-grown solutions for them to be sustainable. It is clearly impractical to conceive of universal remedies for problems which afflict our societies.

My country, as it comes out of the darkness of the last three decades into the light and promise of the future, must be afforded the time and space to seek its destiny in accordance with the wishes of its people. It is in keeping with the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the whole body of international law which governs us.

A further consideration that the international community should take into account is the vulnerability of developing nations and make provision, by means of appropriate institutional arrangements, for their protection.

As I observed when inaugurating the fiftieth anniversary meeting of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee in Colombo three months ago, dumping of commercial and industrial goods manufactured in developed countries imperils the economies of many Asian and African countries represented here.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

In conclusion, let me say that the use of substantial subsidies by Treasuries and Reserve Banks to support agricultural production in the developed world, and other forms of protectionism, cause serious distortion of the interplay of market forces, and reduce to a great extent the ability of farmers in many developing countries to access international markets for their export products on an equitable basis.

The disproportionate pollution of the environment by industrialized countries, and the resultant impact on global warming and climate change, cannot be remedied with any semblance of justice by imposing harsh restraints on developing countries which have contributed very little to aggravation of the problem. These circumstances heighten the importance of social equity at the international level.

May the Noble Triple Gem bless you all.