



SRI LANKA

Statement

by

Hon. G.L. Peiris

**Minister of External Affairs
of the
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

during the

General Debate

of the

67th Session

of the

United Nations General Assembly

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**Address to the General Debate of the 67th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly
Hon. Prof. G. L. Peiris
Minister of External Affairs, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

Mr. President
Secretary-General of the United Nations
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, I congratulate Your Excellency, on your election as the President of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly. Your proven skills and charming personality leave no room for doubt, that under your able leadership we will achieve our goals for this session.

Sri Lanka is also pleased to endorse the theme proposed by you for this year's high-level debate "Adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means in the multilateral global governance system" - a most appropriate theme in these trying times.

The United Nations has provided the premier forum for 67 years for the resolution of international disputes and the negotiation of landmark global goals. In fact, many conflicting aspirations of Member States have been reconciled through the intervention of the United Nations or through the auspices of this august body and its agencies. Some disputes, unfortunately, have taken time to resolve, or remain unresolved, but overall, the results have contributed to longevity of this institution. The United Nations provides an extensive range of options for resolving international disputes and achieving common goals. It is a forum for negotiations, it provides mediation options and good offices, and it is where principled solutions are found. The International Court of Justice provides the major judicial mechanism for the resolution of inter-state disputes.

Mr. President,

In the conduct of international relations, Sri Lanka, a founding member of the NAM, firmly upholds the tenets of peaceful co-existence, mutual respect for each others' sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and equality and mutual benefit. Sri Lanka believes that in the settlement of international disputes, action must be based on the fundamental principle of sovereign equality of states, a principle firmly enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The noticeable recent tendency to selectively and arbitrarily intervene in the internal affairs of states flies in the face of this principle and dilutes the confidence so carefully nurtured in the UN system.

Mr. President,

The global financial crisis has posed a major challenge to the entire international community. It originated in the financial hubs of the world and created serious existential challenges worldwide, in particular, to developing countries. The cavalier attitudes of the financial markets in developed countries, operating without proper regulation, have resulted in the disruption of millions of lives and the social fabric of many societies. The number enduring extreme poverty has been augmented by millions. Full recovery from this crisis remains an uncertainty, as unemployment and debt remain at unsustainably high levels, complicated further by the devaluation of reserve currencies. The cumulative impact of this financial meltdown in developed countries has deeply impacted on the efforts of these countries to achieve transformational socio-economic change and has also impeded progress in realising the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In this context, it is of the greatest importance to ensure that any strategies employed to achieve recovery, do not impose unjustifiable burdens on developing countries, as they strive to achieve better living conditions for their people. A recovery without uplifting the developing countries simultaneously will be unsustainable. It is paradoxical that it is the same countries where the financial crisis originated, which now

seek to provide policy prescriptions to others. While the end result is still in the realm of uncertainty, global discussions continue and the voices of developing countries are an important element in this. Concerns expressed at these negotiations and consultations must be reflected in any new policy guidelines adopted. There cannot be a "one size fits all" approach. The views of all and the experiences of the successful, especially the newly emerging economies, must be taken into account.

It is noted that many countries of the South have weathered the financial storm successfully. The lessons learnt from the previous crises have served them well and precautionary measures to minimize the negative impacts of the current crisis have been taken. These experiences must also be an important element in the eventual solutions developed. Sri Lanka's economy, which has been carefully managed during this period, is one of the Asian economies which has recorded impressive gains. A growth rate of 8.2% was achieved in 2011. Since the end of the conflict in 2009, the areas formerly controlled by the terrorists, the Northern Province, recorded a 27% GDP growth in 2011. The exponential boom in agriculture and fisheries has contributed substantially to this result.

A significant aspect of the process of addressing the financial crises, must be a restructuring of the global financial architecture. It is important to note that global financial power has shifted over recent times from the industrialized North to the power houses of the South. It is imperative that the global financial institutions reflect these tectonic changes in the international arena. They must now be reflected in the global structures, including the UN, its agencies and other multilateral institutions. The UN can play an important role towards achieving this end.

Mr. President,

We are at a significant juncture in human history when climate change looms as the greatest challenge to the very existence of humanity. The future of our children is at stake. Carbon Dioxide emission levels, historically caused largely by a small number of industrialized countries, have impacted adversely on the climate and have given rise to global warming and climate change. It may be too late already. Recurrent droughts,

uneven rain, glacier melt, receding polar ice, sea level rise, unusual weather patterns, all seem to suggest a global environment in crisis. A substantial majority of scientists agree. Many developing countries, including my own, are still struggling to regain lost opportunities and improve the livelihood of their people while staring global warming in the face. Our carbon footprint also remains negligible. It is imperative that the developed world deliver on its solemn undertakings to assist developing countries, as we seek the common goal of arresting climate change caused by human induced causes.

The North - South divide, ideological differences and resource gaps remain a hindrance to global equity and the advancement of humankind. There are vulnerable countries which are struggling to develop their national infrastructures despite being handicapped by inadequate natural resources, limited access to technology and a lack of opportunities to engage in international markets. Our common challenge, and, here the UN must play a central role, is to identify how we can formulate practical common policies to achieve our social goals, reduce poverty and maintain gender equity while protecting the environment for future generations. The countries of the North have a major role to play here.

Mr. President,

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development- Rio+20, held in June this year demonstrated the efficacy of the UN processes. It resulted in a global compromise, including the acknowledgement of the "common but differentiated" principle, and inspired hopes of securing policy approaches to address the multifaceted and, sometimes conflicting, developmental concerns in the context of environmental sustainability. While the end result may not satisfy the lofty expectations of all countries, including my own, it has provided a solid foundation for us to persevere to achieve higher goals through a global negotiation process. The advancement of these policies and approaches is expected to further contribute to creating a sustainable world for both present and future generations.

The potential of the green economy will be less attractive if we do not clearly understand its long-term consequences at a national level on sustainable economic

strategies. The transition to a green economy must not generate negative externalities that would retard economic growth, perpetuate societal inequity and poverty. Assistance to developing countries under North-South Development co-operation mechanisms must take into account global initiatives to mitigate the adverse consequences of too rigid an application of green economic principles. The efforts of developing countries themselves in this regard must be recognized and further facilitated. My own country has successfully conserved a significant percentage of its forest cover, almost 22% of the land area, with the goal of increasing it to 35% by 2020. The use of CFCs has been eliminated. We have also successfully ensured that a herd of over 7,000 elephants still remain in the wild despite the hunger for land by an expanding population. Our carbon foot print is a meagre 0.6 tons per head. Simultaneously, we will achieve the goal of energy for all in 2012 while realizing a 20% saving through efficiency measures.

Sustainable Development Goals should not only have clear links to the MDGs, but must also reflect emerging global development challenges. Mutually agreed elevated SDG benchmarks would further stimulate development partnerships especially in the form of South-South co-operation. However, such partnerships must complement rather than be an alternative, to North-South development co-operation.

As Member States of the UN, we must respect the principles patiently negotiated by the international community: the equality of rights, the equal sovereignty of all States, and the right to development, as underlined in the Rio+20 outcome document. The interests of the developing world must be protected. Hence, no constraining conditions should be applied to development models or approaches adopted by Member States which could prevent the achievement of sustainable development while eradicating poverty.

Mr. President,

The middle-income countries are the main driving force for strengthening our global economy. Sri Lanka's balanced socio-economic policy strategies propelled us to middle-income status a few years ago. As we have repeatedly emphasized, the entry of

countries to middle-income status does not by itself provide a resolution to the issue of poverty and other developmental challenges.

The success in achieving sustainable development worldwide depends on the sustainable development measures of individual countries. Some specific challenges require close attention and appropriate assistance within the framework of international cooperation. In this regard, the responsibility of middle-income countries to receive effective international assistance should be re-enforced by the UN system and other development cooperation mechanisms.

Mr. President,

I wish to mention that Sri Lanka employs a unique development strategy that empowers citizens, with special attention to social development needs. It has continued to achieve transformational change in the lives of its people by effectively mobilizing available resources and through the delivery of sustainable and citizen-centered programmes. Sri Lanka has emphasized synergistic interactions between healthcare and education, public infrastructure development, including improved water and sanitation, and transport and communication, especially under an integrated regional development approach. We enjoy a 98% literacy rate with the score for girls being higher. Our ICT literacy rate is following a path of exponential growth. Cellular phone penetration is over 100%. 85% of the population has access to potable water. We believe that the investments, which brought these results, are essential if states are to build a healthy, literate, productive and entrepreneurial human resource base. The success of this strategy is reflected in Sri Lanka's high-ranking in the human development index.

Sri Lanka has achieved many of the MDGs and is on track to realise all of them by 2015, including the eradication of poverty. Eradicating poverty and improving the quality of life of our people has been the cornerstone of social development policies in Sri Lanka over many decades. Sri Lanka's key policy document, "Mahinda Chintana – Vision for the Future", has set specific targets to combat poverty within the MDG framework. A range of projects has been designed for the eradication of poverty by 2016. Through "Gama Naguma" and "Divi Naguma"

programmes we have been addressing rural poverty eradication and ensuring food security. These programmes continue to promote the concept of self-employment, directing financial and technical assistance to youth and women in rural areas, including those who suffered from the terrorist conflict. The absolute poverty level in Sri Lanka declined to 7.6% in 2011 from 15.2% in 2005. The per capita income increased from US\$ 1,062 in 2004 to US\$ 2,836 in 2011. To improve basic living standards, 4% of the GDP has been distributed to qualifying households for providing education, health services, food subsidies, food stamps and subsidized credit. Even during the height of the conflict, the Government of Sri Lanka maintained schools and hospitals in the conflict affected areas and food and medical supplies were sent to these areas despite crashing artillery shells and whizzing bullets.

The contribution of women in Sri Lanka's successful realization of most of the MDGs is significant. Women, being literate, also encourage their children to focus on education and aspire to higher goals. The traditional knowledge of mothers on maternal health, coupled with their educational background, has contributed significantly to reducing the child mortality rate to 8.9 per thousand and the maternal mortality rate to 39 per 100,000 live births. It is through the participation of women, that Sri Lanka has been recognized for its achievements in the WHO breastfeeding promotion and immunization programmes. I note with pride that Sri Lanka produced the first elected woman Prime Minister in the world in 1960.

Though it was a challenging task for Sri Lanka to balance resource mobilization while fighting a war against terrorism, our government has launched many progressive programmes, especially on poverty reduction and citizen empowerment. We have made genuine efforts to ensure that the fruits of economic development are equally distributed and are accessible, especially to the most vulnerable sectors of society. We have ensured that social mobility is not confined to the privileged in the towns and cities of the country, but penetrates deep into the rural sector.

Three years ago, our Government ended the terrorist challenge largely through its own efforts. Sri Lanka is firmly committed to redressing the grievances of all parties affected by the internal conflict.

After the release of the report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), an action plan to give effect to its recommendations expeditiously has been adopted. A comprehensive National Action Plan for Human Rights with specific time lines has been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The Government has also proposed a transparent and democratic process under a Parliamentary Select Committee to address post-conflict reconciliation issues. This initiative has been regrettably delayed by some opposition parties failing to nominate their representatives.

Sri Lanka exemplifies the challenges faced by a society emerging from the shadow of a sustained conflict which spanned three decades, and entering upon an era of peace and stability. The gradual diminution of these challenges and the brevity of the period which has elapsed since the end of the conflict, leave no room for doubt as to the degree of success achieved by the Government of Sri Lanka in respect of a wide range of issues relating to development and reconciliation. It is only about three years since the conflict ended.

Prioritization was a central feature of the government's plan of action. The progress on the ground during the last three years with regard to the resettlement of internally displaced persons, (all internally displaced persons have been resettled), the re-integration into society of thousands of ex-combatants after exposure to programmes of livelihood skills training which equipped them to earn their living with dignity and independence, the rapid completion of the demining process, and the unprecedented focus on infrastructure development leading to very visible invigoration of the economy of the Island as a whole, and the Northern Province in particular, is quite apparent.

The experience of Sri Lanka demonstrates that, given the quality of dynamic leadership and unwavering commitment which His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa provided, an effective political and military strategy and strong rapport with all sections of the public, it is possible to prevail against the most ruthless forces of terror. No one has greater commitment to reconciliation in an all-inclusive spirit than the government. Unhelpful external pressures that support narrow partisan interests could easily derail the initiatives which have produced substantial results and peace on the ground, as we begin a new and exciting chapter in our country's history.

Our accomplishments are quite remarkable, considering that many developing countries continue to struggle for equitable social development, together with economic advancement. We are always ready to share our experiences with other countries. What we have achieved is not only for us but for all of humanity.

In the international community's quest to bring some semblance of equity in economic development across the continents, we must maintain increased focus on Africa, especially through South- South cooperation. Sri Lanka is expanding its engagement vigorously with the region, especially in matters relating to trade, investment, tourism and technical assistance.

Mr. President,

All our current endeavours should seek a stronger focus on children and youth who are the custodians of our future. Therefore, empowering them with marketable skills, including knowledge of new technologies and vocational training, would enable them to be independent contributors to our economy. Thus, a strong link between education and vocational training policies has created a conducive environment where our younger generation will drive the global development strategies.

We have continuously supported UNGA resolution 66/6 and the need to end the unjust economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. Unilateral sanctions of this nature, which harm ordinary people, should have no place in modern international intercourse.

Terrorism remains a scourge in the contemporary world, threatens our societies and impedes the socio-economic progress of our people. As a country which has emerged from ruthless and brutal terrorism, Sri Lanka continues to resolutely support all multilateral efforts to enhance peace and security, and eliminate all forms of terrorism. In our collective quest to eradicate terrorism, the selective application of principles and double standards must be avoided. Terrorism from wherever it emerges, must be resolutely counteracted.

It is established that terrorism has developed close links with transnational organized crime in the form of cybercrime and identity theft, environment related crime, maritime piracy, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons and drugs. Maritime piracy has emerged as a major threat to international sea-lanes and has added an additional economic burden to global trade. Sri Lanka, as a trading nation for centuries, supports all multinational efforts to counter this threat. But it is to be remembered that piracy originates on land and any solution to piracy must also address its causes on land.

The illicit transportation of migrants to greener pastures overseas by criminal networks requires our collective attention. The pull factors as well as the push factors of this criminal enterprise must be examined. Sri Lanka has now implemented a National Action Plan to counteract human smuggling and trafficking. Sri Lanka also continues to cooperate closely in this regard with our bilateral and multilateral partners. As a member of the Bali process, we are committed to cooperation in capacity building, the exchange of best practices and law enforcement cooperation. At the same time we believe the necessity to share information in good faith, acknowledging that a variety of national interests of member countries is essential to counter the sophisticated human smuggling rings.

One long-standing issue that weighs on the conscience of the international community and which needs our sustained collective attention, is the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Sri Lanka fully supports the implementation of all relevant UN Resolutions on Palestine that would pave the way for the achievement of Statehood for the Palestinian people and bring lasting peace to the region. Sri Lanka fully supports Palestine in its efforts to achieve full membership in the United Nations.

Sri Lanka unreservedly condemns the defamation of all religions and religious leaders. While the right to free speech is fundamental to our value system, that right should not be abused to hurt the feelings of the faithful whether they are Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Jews or followers of other faiths. All available mechanisms must be employed to prevent the defamation of all religions and the exploitation of religious symbols for commercial purposes.

In conclusion Mr. President, Sri Lanka is currently in the process of making arrangements to host the World Youth Conference in 2014. The primary objective will be the strengthening of youth inclusion in national decision making processes in relation to the development and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. I extend an open invitation to all fellow member States to join hands with us to make this global event a success.

I thank you.

