



SRI LANKA

Statement

by

H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

During the

General Debate

of the

**68th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly**

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I warmly congratulate Your Excellency John William Ashe, on the assumption of the Chair of the 68th Session of the UNGA, and also thank His Excellency Vuk Jeremić, for effective stewardship of the last Session.

Mr. President,

The UN has consistently ensured cooperation between States, and provided a universal platform for discussions on a range of issues, contentious or otherwise. It is imperative that we jealously protect and abide by, the principle of equal treatment of countries, which has been the very basis of this global organization. Be it economic or political issues, equality must form the bedrock of all international interaction.

Reflecting on the work of the UN, matters of a political nature have overridden the most basic issues, which affect the underprivileged and marginalized, who dominate world society. The commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) brought a real sense of optimism. The theme for this session is timely, as progress in MDGs could be evaluated with its deadline fast approaching.

Appreciable progress has been made in the MDGs, with the results being uneven among and within countries. According to World Bank projections, by 2015, Sub Saharan Africa and Southern Asia will be home to approximately 40% of the developing world's population, living in extreme poverty. This only diminishes the sense of our optimism. It is fitting for the UN system to examine the causes for the failure in improving the lot of the deprived.

In the context of Sri Lanka, my vision has been to distribute the benefits of growth across all segments of the population and prevent inequalities, social exclusion and adverse environmental effects. Socio-economic achievements in my country are the results of people centric government policies.

Mr. President,

Despite contending with one of the most ruthless terrorist groups in the world, the 2004 tsunami and the global food, energy and financial crises, Sri Lanka's attaining the MDGs is salutary. Statistics speak for themselves. Sri Lanka was ranked 92nd out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index in 2012. Absolute poverty in Sri Lanka declined to 6.5% in 2012 from 15.2%, over a period of five years, surpassing the MDG mid-term target.

The goal of universal primary education will be easily achieved by 2015. The key dividend from this strong educational infrastructure has been a drastic reduction in the unemployment level. Sri Lanka's accomplishments in healthcare include the infant mortality rate of 9.4 per 1000 live births, highlighted by UNICEF as a success story.

The early recognition of the crucial role women play in political and socio-economic development, amply warrants Sri Lanka's sense of pride with the world's first elected woman Prime Minister, the late Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Sri Lanka has been rated 16th in the World Gender Parity Index.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka has mainstreamed youth in its post 2015 development agenda, and is at the forefront of advocating internationally the interests of youth. Sri Lanka will be hosting the Commonwealth Youth Forum 2013, this November and the UN World Conference on Youth, in May 2014.

I also call upon the United Nations to declare an International Skills day as recognition of skills development of youth, paving the way for reduced poverty. An innovative development has been the establishment of a Youth Parliament to sharpen the awareness of democracy and skills of the new generation and prepare them to assume leadership.

It is of the foremost importance that Member states decide individually the means for achieving these MDGs. The unique socio-cultural practices and traditions of countries should be taken into account when designing these processes.

Mr. President,

The post 2015 Development Agenda needs to be an intergovernmental process, in line with the outcomes and agreed principles of Rio + 20. Centuries of growth in advanced economies have left little carbon space for the developing world, challenging their growth. The thin lines of balancing economic development and protection of the environment will remain a great challenge, in future development policy setting. It is therefore critical that developed countries honour their commitments and compensate damage to the environment, on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Eradication of poverty must be the primary goal of the post 2015 Development Agenda, and promote accelerated economic growth in developing countries. Ensuring sustainable growth with social equity, demands a balanced approach towards development. High rates of investment, strengthening the quality of human capital, and technology transfers are crucial for sustainable growth.

Mr. President,

The mechanisms on financing and technology mandated by Rio + 20, need to be urgently implemented. The sustainable development financing strategy in its formulation, must seek to provide for enhanced and predictable financial support to developing countries. Sri Lanka supports the establishment of a Technology Facilitation Mechanism under the UN, recommended in the UNSG's report. The mighty advocates of the rights based approaches, should also honour their international commitments relating to development financing.

Calls for reforms in the current international financial institutions continue to be relevant. Their ad-hoc policies prove to be untenable in the long run. It is imperative for the international monetary and financial institutions, to give expression to the solid voice of the developing world. Also, those countries that are economically blessed must shed their practices of leveraging through these institutions. A comprehensive structural reform of the existing imperfect global economic order, needs to be fully addressed to reflect current realities.

The world is in need of a fair international economic system to revitalize partnerships for development. This includes State and non-State actors and blue-chip companies, emerging as new partners. Moreover, "South-South Cooperation" is crucial due to the shift in economic power, which should be actively promoted to complement "North-South Cooperation".

Mr. President,

It is disturbing to observe the growing trend in the international arena, of interference by some, in the internal matters of developing countries, in the guise of security, and guardians of human rights. Therefore, we continue to witness agitations the world over, leading to violence and forcing political change accompanied by turmoil.

It is timely to contemplate whether such movements have led to better stability in these countries, or produced different results, due to inappropriate external factors. In fact, the positive outcomes envisaged by those responsible have not come to pass, but indeed contributed to making those countries unstable. Does this not erode the authority of the Security Council because of unilateral or group actions?

This trend needs to be arrested, as it has now extended into areas, detrimental to the wellbeing of populations. This turmoil results from attempts to impose a type of democracy, upon countries with significantly different cultures, values and history. The world needs no policing by a few States, particularly when the UN is mandated to ensure international security, through multilateral engagement. This engagement, to be complete in our time, must ensure protection of the human race against the flagrant abuse of modern science in such forms as nuclear and chemical weapons.

Mr. President,

Deepening uncertainties in the Middle East are disturbing. We eagerly await for Palestine and Israel to co-exist on the basis of pre - 1967 borders. Sri Lanka looks forward to welcoming Palestine as a full member of the UN.

We salute the people of Africa in their efforts to achieve better living conditions and economic prosperity. Sri Lanka continues to demonstrate solidarity with the African people, in their pursuit of further socio-economic growth.

Mr. President,

Unilateral measures such as embargoes and economic sanctions, imposed on countries are disturbing. Such initiatives bring suffering not only to those specifically targeted but to a wide range of humanity without any justification. Yet again, I stand in support of the people of Cuba in overcoming economic hardships and full access to economic opportunity.

Mr. President,

Permit me to consider briefly the post-conflict developments in my own country. I am proud that Sri Lanka has eradicated separatist terrorism, spanning three decades, and is in the process of addressing the issues of development and reconciliation. Sri Lanka's government, at all times responsive to the priorities reflected in domestic public opinion, is engaged in all measures required for meaningful progress in these fields.

A significant event in this regard is the opportunity which the people of the Northern Province enjoyed at the elections, held three days ago, to elect their representatives in the Provincial Council. It is a matter of legitimate satisfaction to me that this was made possible after the lapse of almost a quarter of a century. There can be no doubt regarding the crucial importance of this measure in the context of political empowerment and reconciliation. It is clearly the responsibility of the international community to assist with these efforts and to ensure their success for the benefit of all the people of Sri Lanka.

Mr. President,

In spite of the visible progress made, and consistent engagement with UN mechanisms, many countries are surprised at the disproportionate emphasis on Sri Lanka, and the unequal treatment through the multilateral framework. The basis for this relentless pursuit is also questioned. It is my conviction that the UN system should be astute to ensure the consistency of standards applied so that there is no room for suspicion of manipulation of the UN System by interested parties to fulfil their agendas.

By nature, human beings have the capacity to achieve the most challenging and noble goals in life, through strong commitment and dedication. I am confident that, by our own collective efforts these results would prove to be beneficial to all humanity. As Buddha, the Enlightened One said,

"Atta hi attano natho"

"Oneself is one's own benefactor"

Let these timeless words of wisdom guide the destiny of the world.

May the Noble Triple Gem Bless you all.

Thank you.