



79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

General Debate

Statement delivered by H.E.Mohan Pieris,

**Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations,
New York**

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Theme: 'Leaving no one behind: Acting together for the advancement of peace, sustainable development and human dignity for present and future generations'

Duration: 15 minutes

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Sri Lanka felicitates H.E. Philemon Yang of Cameroon, on his election as the President of the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. President,

Against the background of global turmoil, setbacks and transformations, the aspirations of this year's Assembly for a better global future resonate with those of the people of Sri Lanka.

On 23rd September, following a transparent and peaceful electoral process and a dignified transition in keeping with our decades of democratic practice, H.E. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake was sworn in as the 9th Executive President of Sri Lanka. The people of Sri Lanka have vested in him the mandate to realize the people's aspirations for the future and to build a sustainable foundation for future generations.

H.E. President Dissanayake has outlined to the nation his determination to put in place a united Sri Lanka and a transformed ethical political culture. Echoing the wishes of the people, his future trajectory combines nation-building based on public trust in governance and in the political system through accountability, integrity and the elimination of waste and corruption.

In the words of His Excellency President Anura Kumara Dissanayake:

"We are launching ... a unified Sri Lankan nation that respects diversity, fully ending an era of division based on race, religion, caste and class ..."

In order to achieve these objectives, the Government has recognized that it is crucial to reinforce stability and confidence in the economy and stimulate growth. The Government will work within commitments to reach macro-economic stability through the framework of international financial institutions and in negotiations with sovereign and private external stakeholders.

The Government is acutely aware of the hardships that have been faced by the people in the process of economic transition. Measures will be put in

place to generate greater resources for enhanced public expenditure and welfare to raise the living standards of the people, with equity and justice.

The recent vote for change by the people of Sri Lanka presents us with a renewed opportunity, and we are determined to succeed including with the support of our friends in the international community.

Mr. President,

Despite our consensus on the Pact of the Future, this year's UNGA takes place at a moment of profound global crises on multiple fronts. In the Middle East, we are closer to wider regional conflagration than when we convened last week and the humanitarian suffering in Gaza gets worse by the day. The achievement of the SDGs now appears beyond our reach, and we are off target on the Paris Climate Goal to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Big power rivalries and geopolitical tensions have reignited and widened, and new rifts are appearing on North-South lines. Racism, intolerance, discrimination, and xenophobia against migrants are on the rise. Theatres of conflict and tension have opened up on land and in the oceans. The developments in the digital realm provides fertile ground for proliferation of disinformation and hate speech, with the potential for violence. The lingering impact of the pandemic have reverberated throughout the global economy, creating profound economic insecurities, threatening free trade and leading to protectionist barriers. We are spending more on weapons than ever before in the past and regrettably use of nuclear weapons is in mainstream discourse. New domains are being weaponized including outer-space and cyberspace, while the use of AI is challenging International Humanitarian Law in the battlefield.

Excellencies,

Today, a large number of developing countries, including my own, face a debt crisis of unprecedented proportions. This debt distress severely impedes our ability to invest in sustainable development, as we are unable to meet these financial obligations while simultaneously investing in the future and well-being of our citizens. It is a fact that financing challenges remain at the heart of the Sustainable Development crisis. As per the Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024, the SDG financing gap is between USD 2.5-4.0 trillion.

Mr. President,

Given these immense challenges, the need for comprehensive reform of the global financial architecture has never been more pressing. The current international debt resolution framework has failed to respond adequately and efficiently to contemporary challenges. The global landscape has changed dramatically, with global debt, particularly in the developing world, increasingly controlled by international bond markets and non-Paris Club lenders. It is time that we review the architecture's traditional moorings; we must urgently reform this system to reflect the new economic landscape. It is necessary to find a more efficient, comprehensive, and equitable way to address debt.

Other institutions of global governance that reflect the world of the past century need to be reformed to meet the challenges of the present and the future. The composition of the Security Council must be expanded to be representative of current global diversity and decision-making. In parallel,

the role of the UN General Assembly, the most representative primary organ of the United Nations where all countries have an equal voice, must be strengthened and revitalized.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka's commitment to maintaining global peace and security has been unwavering. We recognize that peacekeeping is one of the most effective tools available to the UN to help member states to manage the difficult phase of transitioning from conflict to peace. Sri Lanka has been contributing to UN Peacekeeping operations in some of its most hostile and demanding deployments. Over 23000 men and women from the Sri Lanka armed forces and Police have contributed to ensuring international peace and security under the UN banner over the past 6 decades and been commended for high caliber service.

Mr. President,

Beyond economic recovery, we face an even greater existential threat: the ongoing climate crisis, and the accompanying need for a just energy transition. Although our development trajectory has not contributed to climate degradation, Sri Lanka has taken concrete steps to address these challenges. We will increase our nation's forest coverage and increase renewable energy in our energy mix. It is time for developed countries to fulfill their obligations and assume their fair share of responsibilities under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. We need their support in mitigation and adaptation efforts, as well as compensation for loss and damage. Without a concerted international effort to bridge the climate financing gap, the burden of climate impacts will continue to fall most heavily on those least responsible for the crisis. Sri Lanka is committed to phase out

coal by 2040 and reach net zero carbon emission by 2050. As a climate vulnerable country, Sri Lanka has been advocating for operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund and called for climate justice. There is an urgent need for increased climate financing, especially for vulnerable, developing nations like Sri Lanka.

Two other critical issues which are also relevant to Sri Lanka as an island nation were a part of the discourse during this year's High-Level Week. Sea level rise is an imminent reality affecting millions. While Sri Lanka has taken mitigation measures nationally, as included in the National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change, it is through concerted international action that solutions can be implemented to halt the global warming that is the cause of sea level rise. Sri Lanka initiated the UNGA resolution on declaring 1st March as the World Sea Grass Day, to bring international attention and awareness on a small but significant aspect of universal importance of combatting climate change. Sri Lanka has further been recognized for its contribution to mangrove regeneration programme as a 2024 World Restoration Flagship by the UN, under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Mr. President,

Anti-microbial resistance (AMR) has become a critical public health issue the world over with bacterial resistance linked to around 5 million deaths worldwide annually. AMR, if not contained, has the potential to spiral into a development issue as well with life expectancies declining worldwide. We welcome the target of mobilizing US\$100 million through the Antimicrobial Resistance Multi-Partner Trust Fund to ensure that 60 percent of countries have funded action plans by 2030. However, international cooperation and sustainable financing must increase to meet this goal.

As we seek solutions to global challenges, we must harness the power of technology and innovation. Digital technologies and artificial intelligence offer unprecedented opportunities to accelerate sustainable development. Sri Lanka aims for sustained growth by innovation and envisages an equitable digital transformation through the establishment of accessible digital public infrastructure. At the same time, we call for increased capacity building and technical assistance to bridge the global digital divide and empower all countries to leverage these tools for the betterment of their people.

Mr. President,

This General Assembly's theme calls on us to leave no one behind and to act together for the advancement of peace, sustainable development, and human dignity for present and future generations.

In Sri Lanka, 38% of our total population is youth, which is the most capable and dynamic resource that can contribute to our future development. Sri Lanka advocates for increased youth participation in decision-making processes. After all, the Declaration on Future Generations is theirs. Simultaneously, the new Sri Lanka will realize the aspirations of a just society with greater empowerment for women, who make up to 52% of our population.

Mr. President,

As we look towards the future, we must also address one of the gravest injustices that this Assembly has inherited from the past. Sri Lanka has repeatedly voiced its concern over the dire humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We reiterate our support for the recognition of the legitimate and inalienable right of the Palestine people to statehood and join the call for a two-state solution, based on the 1967 borders, in line with all UN resolutions.

As a country that has suffered separatist terrorism for decades, we condemn the terrorist attacks in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world.

Sri Lanka calls for complete and unconditional lifting of all Unilateral Coercive Measures imposed against any country, as they hinder free trade, right to development and have unintended humanitarian consequences.

Mr. President,

As an island country, we are concerned about the present environmental and geopolitical aspects relating to the oceans. We want our oceans to be free of rivalry, conflicts, and pollution, and to be able to sustainably manage our marine resources. The UNCLOS, with its cohesive and universal nature, provide us with a say in shaping the global maritime system. Sri Lanka remains committed to the balance and collaboration embedded within the Treaty, enabling freedom of navigation and sustainable use of the oceans, respecting the sovereignty of the coastal states.

We must recognize that global challenges demand global solutions. In our interconnected world, no country can solve these complex problems in isolation. We must strengthen our international institutions, enhance

knowledge sharing, and foster stronger relationships. We must work together equitably, ensuring all voices are heard in shaping our shared future. It is encouraging that several developing countries are on the cusp of becoming the leading economies tomorrow. We must bolster South-South Cooperation, to foster economic growth, social progress, and sustainable development among us. However, South-South Cooperation is not a substitute for the responsibilities of the global North as set out in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, as Sri Lanka embarks on a path of national unity, ethical governance and economic recovery and growth with justice and equity under new leadership, we reiterate our commitment to multilateral cooperation in pursuit of peace, prosperity, and sustainability. We must harness the power of international solidarity to confront the interconnected challenges before us as well as to explore durable solutions for the generations to come.

Thank You.