

Address by His Excellency Anura Kumara Dissanayake, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka at the 80th General Assembly of the United Nations
24 September 2025

Theme: “Better together: 80 Years and more for Peace, Development and Human Rights”

Madam President, Mr General Secretary, honoured invitees, distinguished delegates,

Allow me, Madam Annalena Baerbock, to begin by offering my warmest congratulations to you on being elected President of the 80th Session of this organization, formed with the noble aim of bringing about a just and lasting peace among the nations of the world. I would also like to use this opportunity to express my country's appreciation to His Excellency Philemon Yang for his exceptional leadership during the 79th Session.

We are gathered here today to chart the future path of this organisation, which has worked tirelessly for eight decades to bring about a world of peace.

It's my honor to address this august Assembly for the first time as the President of Sri Lanka. As representatives of nations, we all bear the responsibility to work towards fulfilling the aspirations of our people. The decisions we make now will impact people across the world and play a decisive role in the future of this planet, our common home.

Distinguished delegates,

Poverty, a tragedy as old as human civilization, has plagued humankind in its journey through time. For centuries, countries across the world have faced this painful and relentless struggle. Poverty and the problems stemming from it cast an oppressive shadow on our future. This Assembly must pay special attention to eradicate extreme poverty. I believe our conscience dictates us to do so. Poverty is a terrible enemy with many faces. Even as we are gathered here, in the countries we represent, including my own, children are suffering from hunger.

A child's right to education is an internationally accepted basic right. This right is enshrined in the constitutions of most of our nations. Yet, across the world, poverty has denied this right to hundreds of thousands of children. In a world which boasts of its technological advances, how can there be children without access to education?

Education is the foundation of every great nation. It is the most vital factor deciding one's future. We firmly believe that investment in education is an investment in global progress.

Many developing countries are constrained in their struggle against poverty by indebtedness. Low income countries allocate twice as much towards debt servicing, than on education or healthcare. Our people and our countries are mired in debt traps.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges to leave no one behind and to reach the last, first. The Agenda acknowledges the most critical challenge before the world is the challenge to end extreme poverty. I would also like to recall the decisions taken at the Global Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995.

However, wars and political upheavals and the Covid pandemic have obstructed the fulfilment of these hopeful agendas.

I propose to you that the time has come for us to accept inequality and poverty as a global catastrophe, and act accordingly.

Madam president, esteemed guests,

Drugs, and organised crimes linked to drugs have become a serious concern to the world. This has been acknowledged in the World Drug Report 2025 published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. It is a complex issue affecting millions of people globally. The market for drugs and related criminal organizations give rise to myriad issues. Drug cartels are turning entire States into their hunting grounds. Drugs pose a major threat to global health and global politics, and inevitably affect global well-being.

While Sri Lanka is taking effective steps to address this challenge, I respectfully request all of you to join in the effort to implement the global agenda on drugs and crime.

I bring to your notice the need to implement the law strictly against these drug traffickers, prevent them from taking refuge, and set up rehabilitation centres to address those affected.

Madam President, honoured guests,

We regard corruption as an epidemic; causing widespread harm to broad swathes of society. We believe corruption to be an obstruction to development, a threat to democracy and global well-being, and a cause of poverty. Let me remind you that *“Fighting corruption is dangerous. But not fighting it presents even graver risks.”*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 was a remarkable victory for the people of the world. The various achievements of human civilization were not attained overnight. They were all results of unwavering efforts and sacrifices.

The struggle against corruption is a difficult one. But we must take the necessary steps. The first step we take might be difficult. But if we take that courageous first step, a thousand will follow. That is what I believe.

Madam President, delegates,

I represent a small island of nearly 22 million people. Sri Lanka's population is about 0.28% of the global population. It is true that we are small in size and in numbers. Yet we have begun

our determined struggle against corruption for the benefit of future generations of our country and the world.

I propose that rooting out the rot of corruption should become an integral part of the culture of all UN member nations.

Madam President, esteemed guests,

I feel confident that all of you will join me in condemning war. There is no nation in the world that desires war. The result of war is a tragedy wherever it happens. Even now, many countries of the world are experiencing the pain of that tragedy. As a country that suffered through a three-decade long war, we are keenly aware of its futility. No one who sees the pain and the suffering of parents, spouses, and children of the victims of war would ever dream of another. We have witnessed these painful sights with our own eyes.

Even as suffering caused by conflict has reached unprecedented levels, the international community has been reduced to mere bystanders. Opportunistic power politics has turned the lives of children and innocent civilians into a game. No one has the right to inflict pain and suffering on another to enhance one's own power. The duty of a leader is not to destroy lives, but to protect them.

We are deeply distressed by the ongoing catastrophe in Gaza, which has been turned into an open-air prison full of pain and suffering, echoing with the cries of children and innocent civilians. The United Nations and all related parties must continue to work towards an immediate ceasefire, enable adequate humanitarian aid to reach Gaza and ensure the release of hostages of all parties.

We recognise Palestinian people's inalienable right to their own State. We also believe that legal, security, and humanitarian concerns of Israeli and Palestinian people need to be acknowledged. Sri Lanka reiterates the importance of the early implementation of the UN General Assembly resolutions regarding a two-state solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. The time has come for the international community to stop being a mere spectator, and to act decisively to end the suffering of millions.

Religious extremism and racism have been major causes of wars and conflicts bringing suffering to millions of people. Although a century has passed since the abolition of slavery, the poison of racism still lingers in many places. Extremist and racist ideas are as deadly as epidemics. We must ask ourselves how these extremist and racist ideas survive, like sparks under the ashes, in a world that has witnessed so many advances on so many levels. I believe that we must awaken our conscience to oppose racism and religious extremism in protection of human rights and freedoms.

We must be brave enough to speak up for peace. A country's honour and character rests in its fight for peace.

We must move towards the practice of resolving problems not through violence but through our shared humane values.

In a world where millions of children die of hunger, we spend billions on weapons. When tens of millions die of inadequate health facilities, hundreds of millions are spent on futile wars. While hundreds of thousands of children are denied the right to an education, millions are spent on invading another's land.

If every inch of this world can be turned into peaceful communities, what a wonderful world would that be!

I propose that all of us who are gathered here become envoys of peace, committed to transforming our world into a collection of peaceful communities.

As a country that suffered the horrors of war for decades, where loved ones still weep in remembrance of their beloved, we have a duty to make this heartfelt proposal.

We hope our country will not have to experience the horrors of war ever again. We invite the world to witness the miracle of a land without wars, a land of peace and beauty. The people of our country opted for a united Sri Lankan nation based on a new political culture. My government is deeply committed to fulfilling that mandate.

Honoured invitees,

I would like to remind you that during the last election, the people of Sri Lanka decided in favour of a centuries old dream.

An inclusive legislature was born of that decision, reflecting the ethnic and religious diversity of the country, a Parliament in which women and vulnerable communities were elected in historic numbers, including Sri Lanka's first visually-impaired parliamentarian.

We are committed to ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all our citizens.

We have also demonstrated by example, that parliamentarians are there to serve the people. We believe that the duty of legislators is to develop the country, not to enrich themselves.

In the Global Democracy Index 2025, Sri Lanka advanced up 15 places. This is a major accomplishment, within a short time. We strive to move forward to reach the top tier someday soon.

Madam President, distinguished guests,

Our people have chosen light over darkness. They gave their approval to realise the vision of "*A Thriving Nation, A Beautiful Life*". To fulfil this historic mandate, we have focused on creating an administration free of corruption, on eradicating poverty, digitalization, and a

clean country. We also place great emphasis on healthcare and education. We are moving towards these goals step-by-step.

Madam President, distinguished delegates,

Digital democracy is one of our aims. Ensuring that every person in every nation can enjoy the opportunities and benefits presented by the digital age is a global challenge. If we succeed in our task, we will be able to open doors to technology, accelerate development, and strengthen governance. If we fail, technology will turn into yet another force deepening inequality, insecurity and injustice.

The digital divide between States is stark. An even greater gap is being created in relation to artificial intelligence. Sri Lanka and many other developing nations are facing challenges in using AI as a development tool due to inadequate infrastructure.

I invite the international community to work together to remove AI technological inequalities. To fund such efforts, we need cooperation and partnership.

I present to this Assembly a proposal to set up a neutral sovereign “Artificial Intelligence Zone” in Sri Lanka, centred on a green AI data centre, a special economic zone, and a data system facility for partner nations.

Distinguished guests,

During the last several decades, Sri Lanka has demonstrated its commitment to international peace and security through active engagement in disarmament efforts at the global stage. We want to work collaboratively with the United Nations and member states to ensure sustainable peace and collective security through multilateral efforts. We also want to play a greater role in peacekeeping efforts that prioritize the protection of vulnerable groups and promote the fundamental values of the UN Charter.

A renewed commitment to peace and justice is essential if we are to progress in realizing the undertakings on development and human rights.

Madam President, invitees,

We must build a new and a better world, a world which respects the dignity of humankind.

You, who are members of this Assembly, must be the architects of that better world. As President Harry Truman said, on the occasion of founding the United Nations, “*In your hands rests our future*”.

We must act, not in fear or under compulsion, but with hope of a better, more secure world. Today we must commit ourselves not to lead the world to another disaster, but to make it a better place for the next generation.

I have dreams and expectations for my country. You have dreams and expectations for your countries. My dream is to ensure a happy and prosperous life for my citizens. I believe that you have the same dream for yours. We must strive to realize these dreams not in competition with each other, but by moving forward hand in hand.

Peace, dignity, and equality on a healthy planet – that is the UN motto. Let us become the healers of that world.

Thank You.