

# Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of Friendship and Cooperation between Sri Lanka and Cuba

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Address by Tamara Kunanayakam, Ambassador of Sri Lanka, Havana Casa de la Amistad, Cuban Institute for Friendship with Peoples (ICAP) 29 de julio de 2009 Excellencies Vice Ministers! Madam Vice President of ICAP! My dear friends! It is a great honour for me to represent my country on this historic occasion to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of friendship and cooperation between the Republic of Cuba and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. On behalf of our President Mahinda Rajapaksa, his Government, our people, and on my own behalf, I wish to reiterate our sincere friendship, solidarity, and our unconditional support for the historic and irreversible choices made by the Cuban people in favour of the Revolution!

It is politically significant that ours was the first Asian country to recognise the legitimacy of the Cuban Revolution! That was in February 1959! A few months later, we welcomed to our country &ndash; Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara &ndash; Envoy of the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz. At that time, in the context of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, the beginnings of a vision that would later take shape as the Non-Aligned Movement were already visible. And Sri Lanka and Cuba would find themselves among its founders! The recent cordial meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, between our two Presidents &ndash; Mahinda Rajapaksa and Raul Castro Ruz &ndash; is a reminder that Fidel, Che and Solomon Dias Bandaranaike &ndash; our Late Prime Minister who received Che in Sri Lanka in 1959 &ndash; were correct in the historic choice they made to provide a principled framework for relations among newly independent States. That Movement has grown and become stronger! Bestowing it with a permanent structure will enable it to confront with greater vigour and creativity a global capitalist system that is in an unprecedented crisis! Excellencies ! My dear Friends ! May I take this exceptional opportunity to salute Aleida March, who is unfortunately unable to be present with us today, and to express to her, on behalf of all those in my country and on my own behalf, our profound affection and admiration. I am very happy to announce that our Prime Minister has extended an invitation to Aleidita Guevara, who is also unfortunately unable to be with us today, to visit Sri Lanka on the occasion of the Year of the 50th Anniversary. I would, in particular, like to pay a special tribute to two actors, who were witnesses and companions of Che on his historic journey to Colombo 50 years ago : our dear friends Omar Fernandez Carizares and José Mendoza Argudin, who have honoured us greatly with their presence today! Excellencies ! My dear Friends ! It is not my intention today, for lack of time, to review the 50 years of our history nor the agreements signed between our two countries, particularly that signed by Che on 8th August 1959. However, our Embassy has prepared a brochure reflecting the most significant events of the past 5 decades. Today, I would like to place emphasis, specifically, on our present and future relations. Our countries are facing considerable challenges! The global economic, social, energetic, food and environmental crises are taking their toll. Cuba continues &ndash; since almost 5 decades now &ndash; to face courageously a political and economic blockade imposed upon the country and its people by the United States. Sri Lanka, in spite of foreign intervention, has succeeded in defeating terrorism and ending a 28 year-old war at considerable human and economic sacrifice. There can be no ambiguity in the fight against terrorism! Therefore, the Sri Lankan Parliament has demanded the immediate release of Antonio, Fernando, Gerardo, Ramón, and René &ndash; the five Cuban patriots unjustly condemned in the United States. Excellencies ! My dear Friends ! It should be our mission that the 50th Anniversary marks a qualitative leap in our bilateral relations. But, such a challenge will require that we combine our creative energies and the necessary means to undertake concrete actions for the mutual benefit and well-being of our peoples. This also calls for a political will, which is not lacking, but, we must be able to demonstrate greater determination in our ability to realize our decisions. This is vital, given the new global context! Let us, then, rise to the challenges of our times! Let me share with you three objectives to be considered for a solidary cooperation and collaboration, which, in my humble opinion, are not only urgent, but also crucial to guarantee our economic and political independence and sovereignty, ensure food security, and improve the economic and social well-being of our peoples: 1. Firstly, pool together our extensive know-how, our experience, our science and technology; mobilize our human resources with a view to developing our national capacity for their application in the fields of health, food, and the environment. 2. Second, commitment to the philosophy that integrates the human being to the environment! This requires that efforts are made to identify, protect and preserve our traditional knowledge in the fields of agriculture and health. Associating the millennia-old experience of our country in the field of Ayurveda - a 5,000-year-old healing system - with the remarkable and internationally recognised potential of Cuban researchers in the field of biotechnology should allow us to generate an added value vital to achieving our goals. Ayurveda, in Sanskrit, means Science of Life &ndash; human life, animal life, and plant life. Such a philosophy will clearly help us preserve our independence and sovereignty &ndash; values to which both our countries are deeply committed. 3. Thirdly, strengthen people-to-people relations through our national parliaments, provincial and local governments, social and trade union organizations, and other such representative institutions. It is important to launch new initiatives that are in harmony with our aspirations. A flexible structure could be envisaged to facilitate exchange in different sectors of the economy and to propose ways and means to mobilize the financial resources necessary for the realization of our objectives. We will have to rely on our own resources! In this connection, our complementarities constitute an exceptional capital! We must utilize and develop this added value to compensate for the lack of financial resources. Excellencies! My dear Friends! Cuba and Sri Lanka are both committed to economic and political arrangements such as ALBA or the Group of Rio &ndash; as in the case of Cuba &ndash; and SAARC and the Shanghai Forum &ndash; as in the case of Sri Lanka. Together, we are also giving a new impetus to the Non-Aligned Movement. Such alliances contribute effectively toward confronting hegemonic claims and furthering development focused on human needs and aspirations rather than on profit ambitions of multinational

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corporations! At the Special Session on Sri Lanka of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, it was our unity and resoluteness that helped us defeat attempts to intervene in the internal affairs of our country. In a letter addressed a few days ago to His Excellency Chancellor Bruno Rodriguez Parilla, our Minister of Foreign Affairs Rohitha Bogollagama underlined that this was "a culmination of five decades of warm bilateral relations." Our unity and resoluteness should also apply to the situation in Honduras! Tolerating interference in Honduras would amount to legitimizing regime change by coups d'état, setting a dangerous precedent that will have critical consequences for all. Excellencies ! My dear Friends ! I firmly believe that these concerns are shared by many present here! The 50th Anniversary constitutes a unique opportunity to contribute toward the realization of the vision for a better world, a vision that was shared by Che and Solomon Dias Bandanaraiké, and continues to be that of Fidel today. President Mahinda Rajapaksa, in his Felicitation Message of 23rd July addressed to President Raúl Castro Ruz, stated as follows : "On this historic occasion, I wish to reiterate our commitment to pursue the friendship and cooperation between our countries and peoples on the basis of solidarity, reciprocity, and complementarity." Excellencies ! My dear Friends ! I also wish to assure you of my personal commitment to contribute with the force necessary toward achieving a qualitative leap in the cooperation between our two peoples. Thank you !