
Sri Lanka pursues nation-wide agenda of renewal – President

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“International Humanitarian Law should reflect reality of non-state actors in conflicts; The entire focus of our nation, is now on building a lasting peace; healing wounds, ensuring economic prosperity and guaranteeing the rights of the whole nation to live in harmony, stated President Mahinda Rajapaksa addressing the United Nations General Assembly at the UN Headquarters in New York today (Sep 23). We are pursuing a nation-wide agenda of renewal. Sri Lanka has already returned over 90% of the internally displaced persons to their original villages that were previously riddled with landmines, he further said.

A great deal has been said by those beyond our borders about our Tamil community. Let me be clear, no nation on earth can wish Sri Lanka’s Tamil community more good fortune than Sri Lanka itself, President Rajapaksa emphasized.

Following is the speech:

Following are some highlights of the speech: To the mis-guided few, I say, do not allow yourselves to become an instrument of division, hate and violence, to be used as an enabler for hatred to be reborn in another form. Rather come, let us join hands and break the bonds of mis-trust to rise to new horizons Sri Lanka recognises the challenges we face, among the greatest of which is healing the wounds of the recent past. To this end, earlier this year, a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission has been established, giving full expression to the principles of accountability. We believe that for the rebuilding and healing of our nation to succeed, the process must evolve from within. If history has taught us one thing, it is that imposed external solutions breed resentment and ultimately fail. Our economy is well on the way to realising the dividend of peace. We are experiencing steady and sustained growth including during the last quarter of over eight per cent, moderate inflation and low interest rates. We certainly welcome the support of the international community as we rebuild our lands and our economy. We sincerely hope that they will be prepared to take a practical approach to developing partnerships with Sri Lanka through international trade, investment and capacity building. Mr. President Excellencies

I have great pleasure in congratulating Your Excellency Joseph Deiss, on your assumption of the Chair of the sixty fifth Session of the General Assembly. I also take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the President of the sixty fourth Session, His Excellency Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, for his effective stewardship of the General Assembly. Mr. President, Excellencies, That the United Nations is now in its sixty fifth year serves to underline the durability of this organisation. It is an important mechanism in ensuring co-operation between States and a forum for discussion between sovereign nations. We must never under-estimate the importance of this organisation based as it is, on the principle of equal treatment of countries big and small. It is in this spirit that I address you at a crucial juncture in the history of my own country. In two months, I will be assuming office for my second term. My mandate will be very different from my last. For my second term as President, my promise to my people, is to deliver sustainable peace and prosperity to all and ensure that terrorism will not be able to raise its ugly head again. In 2005, I was elected by my people on a promise to rid my country of the menace of terrorism. I say that Sri Lanka is now at peace, peace that was only a dream a few years ago. Over the past year, much has been reported and much has been said regarding my country’s liberation from terrorism. However, far less has been said of the suffering we had to undergo and the true nature of the enemy we have overcome. The rapidly forgotten truth is that we had to face one of the most brutal, highly organised, well funded and effective terrorist organisations, that could even spread its tentacles to other countries. Many of the atrocities of terrorism that the West has come to experience in recent times, the people of Sri Lanka were themselves the victims of, for nearly 30 years, losing almost one hundred thousand lives, among them being a President of Sri Lanka, a visionary leader of India and scores of intellectuals and politicians. The LTTE was an organisation so brutal, that even those it claimed to represent, the Tamil community of Sri Lanka, were as much victims of its terror as the rest of the population of our country. Those who observing from afar, suggested that the Sri Lankan government should have conceded to the demands of the terrorists, need to be reminded that terror is terror, whatever mask it wears and however it is packaged. To all those, I say this. My responsibility is to the entire nation. My responsibility is to the lives of millions of men, women and children, and those yet to be born. My responsibility is to the peace and prosperity of the nation and the right to a peaceful life for all who live there. In this context, it is worth examining the capacity of current international humanitarian law to meet contemporary needs. It must be remembered that such law evolved essentially in response to conflicts waged by the forces of legally constituted States, and not terrorist groups. The asymmetrical nature of conflicts initiated by non-state actors gives rise to serious problems which need to be considered in earnest by the international community. As we close a sad chapter in our country’s history, I would like to remind you that we, along with many others, made repeated attempts to engage the LTTE in constructive dialogue. I still believe dialogue is the best method to resolve any conflict but, it is much to be regretted that all these attempts were rejected with reckless arrogance and contempt. It is in these circumstances that we were compelled to mount a humanitarian operation with the blessings of many international friends, to neutralise acts of terrorism and restore peace and security. Excellencies, The entire focus of our nation, is now on building a lasting peace; healing wounds, ensuring economic prosperity and guaranteeing the rights of the whole nation to live in harmony. We are mindful that in order to fulfil these aspirations, economic development and political reconciliation must go hand in hand. Towards this end, constitutional changes which appropriately reflect aspirations of our people will be evolved with the full participation of all stakeholders. We are pursuing a nation-wide agenda of renewal. Sri Lanka has already returned over 90% of the internally displaced persons to their original villages that were previously riddled with landmines, and provided the essential infrastructure necessary to resume normal life. We have helped bring back the vitality of youth to former child soldiers. We have rebuilt the Eastern Province and begun the same task in the North. Sri Lanka’s Armed Forces now have the role of delivering essential services,

rebuilding habitats, clearing mines and restoring vital infrastructure to whole tracts of formerly decimated land. Despite the lingering dangers that have remained, Sri Lanka has never-the-less repealed a substantial part of the Emergency Regulations so necessary during our conflict situation and plans to repeal a good part of the remainder in the coming months. A great deal has been said by those beyond our borders about our Tamil community. Let me be clear, no nation on earth can wish Sri Lanka's Tamil community more good fortune than Sri Lanka itself. To the mis-guided few, I say, do not allow yourselves to become an instrument of division, hate and violence, to be used as an enabler for hatred to be reborn in another form. Rather come, let us join hands and break the bonds of mis-trust to rise to new horizons. Sri Lanka recognises the challenges we face, among the greatest of which is healing the wounds of the recent past. To this end, earlier this year, a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission has been established, giving full expression to the principles of accountability. This independent Commission, comprising eight Sri Lankans of eminence and stature, has already begun its work. Recently, the Commission handed over to me an interim communication recommending certain administrative steps that may need to be taken in the reconciliation process. We believe that for the rebuilding and healing of our nation to succeed, the process must evolve from within. If history has taught us one thing, it is that imposed external solutions breed resentment and ultimately fail. Ours, by contrast, is a home grown process, which reflects the culture and traditions of our people. We certainly welcome the support of the international community as we rebuild our lands and our economy. We sincerely hope that they will be prepared to take a practical approach to developing partnerships with Sri Lanka through international trade, investment and capacity building. Our economy is well on the way to realising the dividend of peace. We are experiencing steady and sustained growth including during the last quarter of over eight per cent, moderate inflation and low interest rates. During the last five (5) years, we saw our per capita income double. It is our ambition to take this further; to double yet again the present per capita income by 2016 and also become one of the top 30 countries for doing business by 2014. “Mahinda Chinthana – Vision for the Future”, my election manifesto articulates my vision of having sound infrastructure at the national, provincial and rural levels, which is vital for the inclusive growth that will make development meaningful to the entirety of society. I can also proudly claim that my country through the economic strategy is comfortably realizing the millennium development goals, well in advance of the target set by the United Nations. We are at present strongly focusing on putting in place the necessary public infrastructure and strengthening the enabling policy environment for the private sector to invest even more in my country. Mr. President, In order to achieve the full realization of our potential, we desire a supportive external environment. Towards this end, we will always look for constructive engagement and partnerships. We will from our side, continue to contribute as we have always done, to the cause of multi-lateralism and a principled global order. In this regard, I am happy to note that 2010 marks the fiftieth (50) anniversary since we first contributed to a UN Peacekeeping Mission. Our Armed Forces and the Police are today combat tested, with a capacity to carry out their duties in the most challenging of conditions. I wish Mr. President, therefore to use this forum to re-affirm our willingness to further enhance our support to the UN Peace-Keeping Operations. Mr. President, The world unlike in the past has become severely vulnerable to natural disasters. Almost every day we see millions of people becoming victims of severe floods, landslides, volcanoes, cyclones, earthquakes and the like. It has become increasingly difficult for affected countries to manage unassisted, the post disaster recovery programmes. The recent natural calamities in our region underline the crucial need for effective action, in which there is collective participation, to reduce human suffering. Without doubt, climate change and global warming are today issues which demand the urgent attention of all nations. Mr. President, Among the political issues that have continued to fester for too long, is the continued denial of the right of the Palestinian people to a State of their own within recognized and secure borders. It is the fervent hope of the people of Sri Lanka that this most tragic of situations would be resolved without delay in a sustainable manner. We hope that Palestine will be a full member of this Assembly next year. Mr. President, Our guiding principle must always be that of mutual respect in international discourse, even as we dis-approve and condemn measures such as unilateral embargoes. Experience in the recent past amply demonstrates that these embargoes impact not on governments but on the most vulnerable sections of the community. In the same spirit, I would call for the empathy of the international community, towards the aspirations of the Cuban people. Mr President, I also wish to urge with all the emphasis at my command the need for greater concern and involvement on the part of the international community to assist the people of Africa in their efforts to elevate the quality of life on their continent. Leaders who have been chosen by their people often face difficult decisions. They must be entitled to the good will and confidence of the international community with regard to the heavy burdens they are required to shoulder. The results of their decisions must be evaluated objectively and must be allowed to speak for themselves. That is not to say countries should operate in isolation. In this globally inter-dependent world, we must work together where we can and constructively counsel each other where appropriate. The United Nations forms the bed-rock of this interaction and in this role it will always receive the support of Sri Lanka.

May the Noble Triple Gem Bless you!

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