



SRI LANKA

Address by

His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa

President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

at

the UN High-Level Dialogue on Climate Change

"The Future in our Hands:

Addressing the Leadership Challenge on Climate Change"

New York

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Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates

Let me first congratulate the Secretary General for convening this High Level Event on Climate Change. It is timely.

My home is an island in the tropics known for its natural beauty, heir to an ancient civilization that co-existed in harmony with nature and the habitat of a large number of wild elephants in Asia. Ancients referred to it as the most precious island jewel.

In Mahinda Chintana, my election manifesto, I quoted a thought of an ancient ruler of Sri Lanka, "This earth and its vegetation is yours but they must be protected not only for your benefit but also for the benefit of future generations. A ruler is only a temporary trustee and not an owner of your children's heritage."

Largely as a result of human activity, our precious environment is becoming unstable and increasingly hostile. Many experts agree that climate change is a reality. Global temperatures are rising and extreme weather threatens constantly. Melting sea ice, receding glaciers and the increasing number of deserts are a grim reminder of these changes to our climate. Sea level rise is an immediate threat to small island States. Climate change could give rise to security issues that could threaten global peace. We need to take bold steps to address this critical problem.

Developed countries which, in the rush to development, adopted approaches that were not environmental friendly, must bear a greater burden in addressing the threat of climate change. Developing countries which are now seeking only to

improve the lives of their people must be given the ability to achieve their development goals consistent with the need to protect the environment.

I take this opportunity to leave three thoughts with you:

1. The world must recognize the value of the forest cover that many in the developing world have inherited. A value must be placed on maintaining this forest cover for the benefit of humanity. My view is that mechanisms must be established to enable developing countries to engage in carbon trading and trade in the value which is placed on this forest cover.
2. While relevant technologies and financial assistance must be made available for developing countries to adopt an environmental friendly approach to development, traditional knowledge and experience in maintaining the forest cover must be acknowledged and utilised.
3. The UNFCCC must adopt the Climate Change Adaptation Fund. This will help threatened developing countries to deal with climate change.

Thank you.