

# PERADENIYA AT 75 – DIAMOND JUBILEE ORATION, UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, 10 JANUARY 2017

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## Introduction

My warm congratulations to the University; to the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor; to the Council and the Senate; the faculty, the non-academic staff and the students on this momentous occasion. Born in a colonial era in Colombo, and relocated in the bosom of the Hantana valley with the Mahaweli flowing gently by it, this University has been steered through the transition of our country into being an independent nation and a robust functioning parliamentary democracy. The premier University in such a democracy must not only follow its motto “Sarvasva Locanam Sasthra Knowledge is the Eye Unto All” but also enshrine and nurture democratic values. Professor Ramesh Thakur, now of the Australian National University, once wrote,

*“Universities are the marketplace of ideas. The process of transformation of large and complex societies creates social ferment, disorder, dislocation, volatility and, sometimes, even conflict. Universities often find themselves embattled because they are at the forefront of this struggle for social transformation. “A university, as a repository of scholarship, is dedicated to teaching and research in the spirit of free and critical inquiry, tolerance of diversity and commitment to resolution of any difference of opinion through dialogue and debate.”<sup>2</sup>*

I have always been proud that the first academic degree I earned, and the first honorary doctorate conferred on me, were both from the University of Peradeniya in the same region of Sri Lanka where my own family have roots. The chosen theme of your Jubilee celebrations is “A Diamond thus far and beyond.” This is appropriate because not only is every human being a rough diamond that needs to be cut and polished, but diamonds also have many facets which shine equally, brightly reflecting the diversity of the human condition.

I graduated after four invaluable and life-defining years on this spectacularly beautiful campus 56 years ago in 1961. Since then, I have been honored to be invited to speak for a total of six times - including this historic occasion. Those six occasions have marked phases in my life, and in the life of this University which are noteworthy.

Having exceeded the proverbial life span of “three score and ten years” I hope I will be permitted the luxury of recollecting in the tranquility of old age, what I said in the past, in a sort of collage of my associations with Peradeniya.

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<sup>1</sup> Jayantha Dhanapala was a student at the University of Peradeniya from 1957-1961.

<sup>2</sup> Ramesh Thakur (2006) ‘Opinion-The quality of India's higher education’ [online] *The Hindu*, December 09. Available from: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/the-quality-of-indias-higher-education/article3031530.ece> (Accessed 04 January 2017).

## Ludowyk, Literature and Diplomacy

The first occasion was in 1997, after I had retired prematurely from the diplomatic service of the Government of Sri Lanka, and before accepting UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's offer of the post of Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. I was invited to deliver the E.F.C. Ludowyk Memorial Oration.<sup>3</sup> It was an appropriate moment, while paying homage to an intellectual giant of Peradeniya, to reflect upon the relevance of my academic experience of studying English Literature to my chosen vocation of diplomacy. I would like to quote briefly from what I said on that occasion before I focused on the wonderful poetry of Pablo Neruda –

*“There is an inescapably mordant tradition amongst Sri Lankans to be self-denigratory and in that spirit it has seemed to me that we are often perversely unable to recognize, and honour "prophets" in our own land. Professional rivalries and other petty considerations frequently prevent us from throwing bouquets as enthusiastically as we throw brickbats. I am, therefore, happy that another great adornment in our intellectual life, the distinguished bibliographer Ian Goonetilleke, has generously endowed this series of annual lectures to commemorate the life and work of Professor E.F.C. Ludowyk. May it survive, long after the generation that knew Ludowyk has passed on, as a shrine to the eternal values that Ludowyk represented and his deep love for this land and her people.*

*My twin and life-long interests in literature and diplomacy have led me to a fascination with those in the diplomatic profession who have succeeded in retaining the creative spark under the carapace of protocol; to evoke through metaphor and imagery the kaleidoscope of different countries and cultural experiences they are privileged to live through forsaking the jargon of diplomatic dispatches and reportage; and, to remain sharply sensitive and emotionally responsive to the universality of the human condition unencumbered by nationalistic posturing and representational zealotry. And yet, both the diplomat and the creative writer must possess an acute sensibility and must be able to communicate. Sharp observation and the ability to register experiences and convey them are also shared virtues. But while the creative writer explores subtle shades of thoughts and emotions, the diplomat has to be precise and unambiguous in conveying situations or encounters.”*

## Homage to Gurus and Professionalism

The next occasion was the extraordinary honour bestowed on me in the Millenium Year of 2000 by this University when I was conferred with the degree of Doctor of Letters (Honoris Causa) – the first of five Honorary Doctorates awarded to me by Universities in

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<sup>3</sup> Jayantha Dhanapala, “The Diplomat as a Creative Writer: Pablo Neruda” E.F.C. Ludowyk Memorial Lecture, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, 25 November 1997. [online] Available from: <http://www.jayanthadhanapala.com/content/ws11LudowykMemorialLecture.html> (Accessed 04 January 2017).

four countries. That was a touching gesture to a grateful pupil, and I expressed my sentiments in the following words<sup>4</sup> –

*“In the U.S.A., where I now live and work, the climax of a University student's career - this academic rite of passage - is called a "Commencement" ceremony signaling the beginnings of a sojourn in life where it is the journey and not the arrival that matters: where the savouring of the experience of living, in accordance with the values your University training has moulded in you, is more important than the achievements you may attain. I am, myself, close to the end of my life's odyssey and I would like, therefore, to use this occasion to pay homage to my Peradeniya gurus who prepared me - in and outside the lecture rooms - for the commencement of my journey through life. To their successors I express my profound admiration for their dedication to our nation-building efforts through education and the robust assertion of academic independence, and freedom, despite enormously difficult conditions.”*

I continued with an earnest plea for the pursuit of professionalism in our country which is as valid today as it was seventeen years ago especially in my own profession of diplomacy. It is seriously worrisome, when, even a Government which won an unambiguous mandate for good governance or “Yahapalanaya” continues blatantly to make political appointments of relatives and cronies at Head of Mission and other levels, while professionally trained career diplomats languish under-utilized. I said then –

*“Greater emphasis on the highest standards of professionalism is another need across the spectrum. As a graduate from Peradeniya, while I had the basic qualifications, I was untrained for the profession of diplomacy. That training came later both in Sri Lanka and abroad.*

- *It is professionalism, that gives us all our integrity and our independence irrespective of which party is in power influencing public discourse without being captives of it.*
- *It is professionalism, that empowers us to make our contribution to the economic and cultural life of our Country.*
- *It is professionalism, that has won plaudits for our expatriate Sri Lankans abroad and has made them valued citizens in their adopted countries, while their colleagues have languished in Sri Lanka as unsung and underpaid heroes or victims of politically inspired discrimination.*
- *It is not the patronage of the powerful that won Duncan White and Susanthika Jayasinghe their Olympic medals. It was hard work and professionalism.*

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<sup>4</sup> Jayantha Dhanapala, *Address at Convocation Ceremony of University of Peradeniya*, 21 December 2000. [online] Available from: <http://www.jayanthadhanapala.com/content/ws9PeradeniyaUni.html>, (Accessed on 05 January 2017).

*Finally, upgrading your professional skills enhances your marketability in today's globalised world. Like education, professional training is a continuous process as we keep our minds open to new ideas, new technologies and new challenges which render old concepts and orthodoxies inadequate. While veneration of received wisdom has its place, especially in our Asian culture, we must also be able to use the Socratic method which lies at the heart of the European Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution and the development of contemporary Western civilization.”*

## **Global Trends**

The third occasion was when I was invited to be a Guest Lecturer at the Peradeniya University Research Session (PURSE) in 2008 - a great innovation in the academic calendar of this University. I was able to address the value of research, the changing nature on international relations, and the need for innovative technologies to address their complex inter-relationships –

*“Arthur Koestler once wrote - “If politics is the art of the possible, research is surely the art of the soluble. Both are immensely practical-minded affairs.” Despite the notoriously dilettantish nature of the diplomatic profession, research has been, for me, an inescapable part of the diplomat’s toolkit for the investigation and analysis of situations and trends and in the composition of reports and speeches. As an intellectually invigorating interlude in my diplomatic career, I also directed and engaged in research at the United Nations Institute of Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) for five years, working on problems in the global disarmament agenda. Thus research is an eminently practical endeavour, not necessarily confined to the ivory tower of universities or the laboratory of the scientist. The encouragement of research and the adoption of research methodologies in as many areas of activity as possible can only be beneficial. We cannot claim, a priori, that the location of research in a University is better than in a NGO ‘think-tank’ whether it is foreign funded or not. Marga Institute, for example, as a pioneering socio- economic research group has produced some excellent research, employing many graduates of this University. So also has the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Kandy under a former University of Peradeniya Professor Kingsley de Silva – the doyen of our historians. No doubt, post-graduate research institutes within Universities do provide additional facilities and the teaching of students by graduate researchers is an important dimension missing in other research institutes. Perhaps collaboration between University-based researchers and other research bodies, both within Sri Lanka and outside, could help in the cross-fertilization of ideas and in the vital area of funding. Ultimately research priorities and research methodologies should be left to the researchers to decide on. That is a part of the invaluable academic freedom that any University must have. Whether one adopts the research methodology of the logical positivists, Karl Popper’s empirical falsification or Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionism, research is essentially about the solving of problems. And of course, the solutions to problems have wide-ranging benefits both tangible and intangible, nationally and internationally.”*

Addressing the complex nature of international relations, I went on to say,

*“As the world faces the unprecedented global financial crisis at the same time as it discusses common solutions to the problems of climate change, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, (replaced by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals today) a gradual shift in the centre of gravity of global power is taking place. New engines of economic growth in the South – China, India, the ASEAN nations, South Africa and Brazil – are powering their countries into positions of influence in global decision-making. The concept of international peace and security has today evolved into a combination of military security, development and human rights – each component as important in itself, but best pursued in tandem with the others.*

*Likewise, we are seeing the essentially interconnected nature of the problems of the international financial crisis, climate change, rising fuel and food prices, weapon proliferation, terrorism, pandemics and several other global problems. All this requires increased global co-operation and the compliance with multilateral norms.”*

### **Multilateralism and Human Rights**

The next occasion, was when I was Chief Guest at the Convocation of External Graduates of Peradeniya University in 2013. Having been present at the late Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike’s eloquent Convocation Address at Peradeniya in 1957 -the very first year of my undergraduate career, I spoke<sup>5</sup> – while referring to the late Premier’s speech - of the importance of multilateralism in foreign policy.

*The time is long past when individual countries, however rich and powerful, could rely on themselves exclusively to achieve their political, economic and environmental security. Belonging to the multilateral order requires us all to conform to multilateral norms whether they are international treaties and conventions or principles that have been accepted in global conferences. In violating these norms, countries run the risk of being outcast, and are the subject of boycotts and sanctions. Advocates of multilateralism are frequently criticized as being unpatriotic in a subtle undermining of policies of greater interaction with the international community. Wrapping themselves with the national flag, advocates of concepts of unilateralism are able to make serious inroads in public opinion to the ultimate detriment of national security. Xenophobia is often the refuge of critics of multilateralism.*

*This is especially true when we come to the controversial subject of human rights. Human rights are not a “white man’s burden” or a luxury that only the rich countries can enjoy and enforce elsewhere outside their boundaries. It is in the interests of the entire international community that the upholding of human rights everywhere has become a global public good. It is not a right to be*

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<sup>5</sup> Jayantha Dhanapala, *Address at the Convocation of External Graduates of the University of Peradeniya*, 27th June 2013. [online] Available from: [http://www.jayanthadhanapala.com/content/University\\_of\\_Peradeniya\\_Convocation\\_2013.pdf](http://www.jayanthadhanapala.com/content/University_of_Peradeniya_Convocation_2013.pdf) (Accessed on 05 January 2017).

*pursued only in courts of law and international human rights fora. It is the common property of the people to be safeguarded and exercised, as with all human rights, in the mainstream of society. Human rights are a global common in the same way as the protection of the environment and preventing climate change is and has to be mainstreamed in our collective consciousness. No country has a perfect human rights record. A collective and co-operative effort to advance the cause of human rights throughout the world must replace the adversarial and sanctimonious finger-pointing exercise and the double standards that contemporary human rights dialogues have descended into.”*

## **The National Contribution of Peradeniya and Sarachchandra**

Finally, two years ago, I was called upon to address the national contribution of Peradeniya University I said then<sup>6</sup> –

*“Universities are essential to a country’s economy and society. They benefit their local and national economies through creating jobs, delivering highly skilled individuals to the economy, and, through research, developing new products and services. Universities also benefit society through improving livelihood opportunities for individuals, contributing to greater community cohesion and social inclusion. I see Peradeniya’s impact as being largely cultural influencing the national ethos as no other University has done.*

*Let me begin with the intangible benefits that I think Peradeniya has contributed as an institution - and that has been primarily in the realm of values. The concept of a university as it originated both in Europe and in Asia was essentially that of a community of teachers and scholars. The transition from the religious origins of Universities, to the more secular, took place at different times across the world. While the core of Confucianism is humanistic, with seats of learning in China being secular, we know that Taxila and Nalanda in India also had strong secular traditions before the Reformation and Renaissance transformed European universities to secular institutions. The sense of a community pervaded Peradeniya from the very beginning and continues today. That community was strengthened by the Free Education policy that had such a deep impact on all levels of education in the country. It cannot but have influenced Peradeniya alumni as citizens of our country, to bond together with other fellow-citizens in times of civil strife and in victory; in times of economic distress and in prosperity and at times of natural calamity, like the tsunami and amidst the natural beauty with which we are so richly endowed, right here in the verdant valley situated in the lap of majestic Hantane with the Mahaweli embracing this campus in its gently flowing arc.*

*But it was not enough that there should be a sense of community. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, Cardinal John Henry Newman in his famous “The Idea of a University” stated –A University seems to be in its essence, a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse, through a wide extent of country.” So personal communication and thought were essential parts*

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<sup>6</sup> Jayantha Dhanapala, *The National Contribution of The University of Peradeniya Address by Jayantha Dhanapala at University of Peradeniya. 09th October 2014. [online] Available at: <http://www.jayanthadhanapala.com/WritingsStatements.html> (Accessed 05 January 2017).*

*of the community that was a University and a residential University as originally conceived by Sir Ivor Jennings was ideal for this purpose. The advent of the so-called “knowledge-based society,” in which new knowledge, information and technologies increase in their significance as the foundation of activities in various fields, such as politics, economics and cultures, is enhancing the meaning of universities as the “knowledge base” .*

Referring to another Peradeniya giant I said in conclusion –

*“....if I had to name just one individual who epitomizes Peradeniya’s national contribution, or the Peradeniya Chintanaya (if I may use a popular term), it is Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra. This (2014) is his birth centenary year and it is fitting that a festival of his immortal plays should follow this event in the Open Air Theatre named after him. Deeply rooted in our folk culture with a profound and liberal understanding of Buddhist philosophy and its broad inclusivity, his sensitive appreciation of music and theatre, and the interplay of literary traditions in our country and the world – Sarachchandra, more than anybody else, is the Peradeniya figure I would want future students to emulate. He is also symbolic of the national contribution of Peradeniya.”*

*Let me conclude by emphasizing, that a University is not a corporate body to be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis. Education is not a commodity in the market place, although many in Sri Lanka, including policymakers, appear today to be treating it as such. I can do no better than quote the Sinhala poem from the “Vadan Kavipotha”<sup>7</sup> of the Kandyan period of Sinhala Literature –*

“තුබු තැනක සොර සතුරන් ගත	නොහෙනා
එසැඩ මනා වත් වතුරෙන් වල	නොහෙනා
කෝප වුවත් රජ මැතිදුන් ගත	නොහෙනා
උගතමනා ශිල්පයමයි මතු	දකෙනා”

*“Only learning remains through one's life,  
For in no place can it be stolen by thieves or enemies,  
Nor will it be washed away by strong currents of water,  
Nor can the king, in anger, confiscate it.”<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> ‘Vadan Kavipota,’ was an 18<sup>th</sup> century verified composition by the royal tutor Attaragama Bandara, considered one of the old school textbooks in use in the Kandyan kingdom until recent times.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Vadan Kavipota’ (verse 30), J. B. Disanayaka, (1993)(p.66), The Monk and the Peasant Padukka: State Printing Corporation.(Prof.J.B.Dissanayake is a distinguished alumna of the University of Peradeniya).

## The World Today and the Ethical Values of the United Nations

Now let me come to the present occasion where, after 75 years, Peradeniya is embarking on a journey when global and national developments in 2017 give us no cause for optimism. We are at a transformational moment. Violence and conflict triggered by extremist ideologies and an arms race result in a total of \$1676 billion on military expenditure alone in 2015 blot the global scene.<sup>9</sup> Nine nuclear weapon armed states with a total arsenal of 15,395 warheads, 4120 of them<sup>10</sup> operationally deployed threaten the catastrophe of nuclear war intentionally or by accidents like computer error. Populism – a counterfeit brand of democracy – is being enthroned in the West and other parts of the world, including in Sri Lanka, and growing intolerance of minorities is spreading, triggered by the largest wave of human migration of refugees and displaced people since World War II. The tiger which was once portrayed in Jean Giradoux’s play as being at the gates, as Troy tried to avoid war with the Greeks, is not only within the gates but within ourselves. We must, each of us, come to terms with accepting the need for tolerance, goodwill and equality of our fellow citizens and make 2017 the ‘Year of Reconciliation.’ We must build the walls of defence against a rise of fascism and this must take place in Universities like Peradeniya in the minds of our students and in their values.

As I survey the current generation of political leaders both in Sri Lanka and in other countries, I recall the words of the founder of the European Union Jean Monnet who said, “*Nothing is possible without men, but nothing lasts without institutions.*”

Our future can best be guaranteed by investing in institution building enshrining eternal values drawn from our indigenous history and culture, the four religious philosophies which nurture our people and the pragmatic wisdom of adapting modern technology for the benefit of all our citizens faced with unprecedented challenges.

Chris Patten, the Chancellor of the University of Oxford, wrote recently<sup>11</sup> -

*“Universities should be bastions of freedom in any society. They should be free from government interference in their primary purposes of research and teaching; and they should control their own academic governance. I do not believe it is possible for a university to become or remain a world-class institution if these conditions do not exist.*

*The role of a university is to promote the clash of ideas, to test the results of research with other scholars, and to impart new knowledge to students. Freedom of speech is thus fundamental to what universities are, enabling them to sustain a sense of common humanity and uphold the mutual tolerance and understanding that underpin any free society. That, of course, makes universities dangerous to*

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<sup>9</sup> ‘World military expenditure 1988-2015’[online]Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Available from: <https://www.sipri.org/research/armament-and-disarmament/arms-transfers-and-military-spending/military-expenditure> (Accessed 04 January 2017).

<sup>10</sup> ‘Global nuclear weapons: downsizing but modernizing’[online]Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Available from: <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2016/global-nuclear-weapons-downsizing-modernizing> (Accessed 04 January 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Chris Patten,(2016) ‘The Closing of the Academic Mind’[online] February,22,Project Syndicate. Available from: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/academic-freedom-under-threat-by-chris-patten-2016-02> (Accessed 04 January 17).



*authoritarian governments, which seek to stifle the ability to raise and attempt to answer difficult questions.*

*But if any denial of academic liberty is a blow struck against the meaning of a university, the irony today is that some of the most worrying attacks on these values have been coming from inside universities.”<sup>12</sup>*

And so threats to the autonomy of Universities and the freedom to think independently can come not only from authoritarian Governments and extremist movements outside our campus but also from groups within - whether in bottle-lamp classes or through hazing or ragging, subjecting groups of students to the tyranny of having to conform to patterns of thinking dictated to by one group or another for political and other reasons. We must develop a sense of history and tradition within Peradeniya so that never again will we have students ignorant of the identity of Sir Ivor Jennings, and the desirability of having a hall of residence named after him. Nor should we ever again see the desecration of the Sarachchandra Open Air Theatre.

Let me now move on to the United Nations. Throughout my life I have had an abiding faith in the United Nations Organization which, three years hence, will celebrate its own Diamond Jubilee. The foundation document of that unique world body – the Charter – is not only the bedrock of international law, but also the most inspiring document that can hold the international community together amidst its diversity and conflict. Individual countries and Governments are dominated by their separate concepts of national security whereas the UN has to weave 193 of these national security concepts of member states into a tapestry that will serve the common security of the global community in a co-operative and credible manner. As a new Secretary-General begins his term at the UN with rich experience, wise leadership qualities and unalloyed idealism, we have an opportunity to implement the principles of the Charter in an equitable manner. The first statement<sup>13</sup> of Secretary General Antonio Guterres was simple and direct– *“Peace must be our goal and our guide. All that we strive for as a human family – dignity and hope, progress and prosperity – depends on peace. But peace depends on us.”*

The Intellectual History Project<sup>14</sup> of the UN led by Sir Richard Jolly and others has documented the ideas launched by the UN system in the area of economic and social development alone. It is a glimpse of the remarkable vision and creativity of the founders of the UN, which must remain, unchanged to inspire us and guide us. It shows how the UN in its economic and social development work has often been significantly ahead of governments, academics and other international institutions that later adopted its ideas. The capacity to generate these ideas must continue.

As the Project stated in 2001, "Ideas matter. People matter"- and ideas that benefit the peoples of the United Nations matter the most. The UN is uniquely situated to be a vanguard of global public opinion. Transcending individual state-centred approaches, the UN can take a synoptic view of issues highlighting a multilateral perspective with global

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<sup>12</sup> Emphasis - the speaker's own.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, *Appeal for peace from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres*, 1 January 2017, [online] Available from: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-01-01/appeal-peace-un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres> (Accessed 05 January 2017).

<sup>14</sup> For further information refer 'Intellectual History Project of the UN'[online] Available at: <http://www.unhistory.org> (Accessed 05 January 2017).

interdependencies clearly delineated. And because these synoptic views are based on consensus, broader public acceptance is made easier.

Over the six decades of the UN's existence we have seen many successes although major challenges remain. The achievement of the decolonization of scores of Asian and African countries; the focus on Human Rights and its mainstreaming in international relations; the emphasis on Environment and Sustainable Development; on Gender issues and the shaping of a co-ordinated response to globalization, to terrorism, and other global challenges like HIV/AIDS are some of them. At the same time the UN has been engaged in the prevention of conflict and, where conflict has broken out, in peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding.

It is in this context, that we must reflect on how our world body can be reformed to face the challenges of the future based on the experience of the past. We must begin with a foundation of ethical values that we can share. The use of the term "Ethics" for a set of moral principles presupposes that we are all bound by a common understanding of what we mean. In a very broad sense, we are talking about the absolutely irreducible minimum of humankind's cultural, moral and spiritual achievement over centuries of civilization. It is not only what distinguishes the human species from other living beings, but also the soul of humankind. It is the quintessence of all religious philosophies and the highest common factor among all cultures.

Ethics per se, would be of little value if it did not have a practical propensity to be applied to human affairs and the improvement of the human condition. It is widely, but wrongly, assumed that the realm of ethical values and the world of pragmatic politics are wide apart and that never the twain shall meet. The achievements of the UN illustrate that there can be a fusion between ethics and policy, and it is this fusion that contributes to the betterment of mankind and to peace.

We are still in the early years of the first century of a new millennium in the human saga leaving behind the bloodiest century of all time. There is a unique opportunity for us to use the indisputable authority that the UN wields to shape a world order that is built more solidly on ethics than on the pursuit of individual profit or national self-interest. In the year 2000 the largest ever gathering of Heads of State and Government met at the United Nations in New York and issued the historic Millennium Declaration. Significantly, before the Declaration embarks on setting objectives in respect of the different areas of peace, security and disarmament including the elimination of weapons of mass destruction especially nuclear weapons; development and poverty eradication; human rights, democracy and good governance including the Millennium Development Goals; protecting the vulnerable and meeting the special needs of Africa, it addresses the issue of fundamental values underpinning international relations in the twenty-first century. That demonstrates a remarkably sound judgment of priorities. If the leaders of the world cannot agree on the ethical values that bind them together, they are unlikely to agree on common goals and common strategies to overcome what former Secretary-General Kofi Annan called "problems without passports".

It is relevant for us therefore, at this juncture to review these shared values set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration as a common ethical base. They comprise six of the most basic aspirations of humankind -- freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility. From each of these fundamental values we

draw our guidance for the specific action plans that the international community committed itself to in the Millennium Declaration. It is a moral compass for us all. Individually these values represent powerful forces that have inspired and motivated humankind throughout millennia of history. They have been accelerators of human progress. Collectively they represent the benchmark against which we must judge our performance as individual nations and as the world community in taking humankind forward to a better and safer world.

The translation of these ethical values into the daily world of human interaction -- to do the right thing for the right reason -- presents all of us with an enormous challenge. No Government or group can claim a monopoly over wisdom. Nor can they claim to be the sole interpreters of the national or global interest. That task is essentially a multilateral task to be achieved by consensus. Let us translate that task to local needs and local challenges whether in Peradeniya or elsewhere. The longevity of institutions is not by itself a virtue. The quality of its contribution to human society and to history is the ultimate measure of its success.

I pray that Peradeniya in future years will attain that success.