

**Opening Remarks by Ambassador Ms Himalee Arunatilaka, Permanent
Representative of Sri Lanka**

The Most Ven. Phravimolsasanavides, President of the Union of Thai Sanghas in Europe

Ven Dr. Thawalama Dhammika Nayaka Thero, Chief Sanghanayake of Sri Lanka in Switzerland & Chief Incumbent of the Geneva International Buddhist Centre

Ven Welegedara Sumanajothi Thero, International Buddhist Foundation, Geneva

Venerable Members of the Maha Sangha present,

Her Excellency Tatiana Valovaya, Director General of the UN Office in Geneva

Her Excellency, Suphatra Srimaithreephithak, Permanent Representative of Thailand to the UN

Excellencies

Dear friends,

This year, for the first time after the COVID pandemic, the Permanent Missions of Sri Lanka and Thailand joined hands to organise this Vesak celebration, in collaboration with the International Buddhist Foundation in Geneva.

Sri Lanka has a long association with taking Buddhist teachings and practices to the world. The celebration of Buddhist festivals is a centuries-old tradition, and in Sri Lanka Vesak has been celebrated as far back as 2,100 years ago by the ancient kings, according to the Mahavansa, the historical chronicle of Sri Lanka.

However, the celebration of Vesak as is done today, marking the triple sacred events of the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Parinibbana of the Buddha was formalized at the First Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, which was held in Sri Lanka in 1950, on an initiative by Sri Lankan scholar and diplomat Dr. G.P. Malalasekera.

The resolution adopted at this World Conference requested the Heads of Governments of all countries in which large or small number of Buddhists are to be found, to take steps to make the full-moon day in the month of May a Public Holiday in honour of the Buddha, who is universally acclaimed as one of the greatest benefactors of Humanity.

Sri Lanka has also been at the forefront in achieving international recognition to the Day of Vesak within the United Nations. The idea of gaining international recognition for the Vesak Day was mooted at the International Buddhist Conference held in Sri Lanka in 1998 to which there was unanimous agreement by all participating countries.

Accordingly, in 1999, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, the late Hon. Lakshman Kadirgamar, tabled the proposal on behalf of 10 countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand – to the United Nations General Assembly, and Resolution 54/115 of 8 February 2000 titled “International Recognition of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations Offices” was adopted by consensus. The resolution was co-sponsored by 34 countries representing all regions of the world.

This Resolution acknowledged “the contribution that Buddhism, one of the oldest religions in the world, has made for over two and a half millennia and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity”. Since then, Vesak has been celebrated every year at the UN Headquarters and other UN Offices.

Issuing a Vesak Day Message, President Ranil Wickremesinghe recalls that Vesak is a revered occasion to venerate the noble teachings of the Buddha, which includes the Four Virtues of *Metta* -loving kindness, *Karuna* - compassion, *Muditha*, - empathetic joy, and *Upekha* – equanimity, that are upheld in Buddhist philosophy, which are morals for all humanity to aspire to.

These are also resonant with the values of the United Nations family.

Foreign Minister Ali Sabry, in his Vesak Daz message notes that the Buddha is acclaimed as a great scientific thinker and a philosopher whose teachings are universal and stand contemporary even today. Particularly given the complex global challenges of today, the Buddha’s message of peace, compassion and loving kindness is ever more essential in practice, while the timeless values of non-violence, non-discrimination and equality preached by Lord Buddha, can continue to be embraced today as a means of conflict prevention, and in the promotion and protection of human rights.

Let me end by paying my respects once again to all the Venerable Members of the Maha Sangha who are present here with us. My sincere thanks also to the Director

General of the UNIG whose participation underscores the importance attached by the UN to this most sacred day for millions of Buddhists all over the world.

And once again thank you all for your valuable presence in this very important celebration. Thank you.