

**SPEECH BY HON.RATNASIRI WICKRAMANAYAKA, PRIME
MINISTER OF SRI LANKA AT DHAMMAKAYA FOUNDATION,
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Most Venerable Phrarajabhavanavisudh, President of Dhammakaya Foundation, Most Venerable Phrabhavanaviriyakhun, Vice President of Dhammakaya Foundation, Distinguished Foreign Invitees. Devotees of the Dhammakaya Foundation and Fellow Buddhists

I am indeed very happy to be invited to participate in the Magha Puja ceremony organised by the Dhammakaya Foundation, in these serene surroundings in Pathum Thani. I wish to express my deep appreciation, on behalf of Buddhists in Sri Lanka, for the noble gift of 222 Dhammakaya Buddha images, last year, for distribution to temples in Sri Lanka, by the Most Venerable Phrarajabhavanavisudh, President of Dhammakaya Foundation, last year.

Sri Lanka and Thailand are both predominantly Buddhist countries. We have very close relations but pride of place must be given to our religious ties.

Sri Lanka became the centre of Theravada Buddhism after its decline in India. It was from Sri Lanka that the word of the Great Master radiated to other countries in Asia. There is archaeological evidence to show that there were Buddhist contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand even at the time of Dvaravati Kingdom. Sri Lanka later turned to Thailand, then Siam, to restore Upasampada following the decline of Buddhism in our country due to foreign invasions and colonial rule.

We are happy that both our countries managed to remain Buddhist despite many vicissitudes. Buddhist countries face many challenges today. Some challenges have internal origins like terrorist threats. There are external threats from neo-religious organisations bent on conversion of vulnerable groups. There is a need to develop still closer relations between Buddhist countries. Together we can overcome challenges to Buddhism.

The teachings of the Buddha are eternal. They are valid even today as they were valid two thousand five hundred years ago. They are very relevant to modern day world when the humanity is faced with severe perils. Buddha's teachings of peace, compassion, loving kindness and equanimity can lead the mankind on the path of righteousness.

The world has made marvellous strides in science and technology. We have become a global village due to these advances. While these advances benefited mankind there is a negative impact from some of them. Some modern advances have corrupted young generations. It is sad but true that there has been a regression of moral values in many countries including Buddhist countries.

There is a moral duty cast on leaders of Buddhist countries to inculcate the true values of Buddhism in order to save young generations from declining moral values. This trend can be arrested through teaching of Buddha Dhamma. The rat race among students in many countries to achieve better examination results leaves no time for them to study religion and ethics.

Buddhism is the noblest gift that can be passed on to future generations. As Dhammapada says the gift of Dhamma excels all gifts (Sabbadanam dhammadanam jinati).

There is a tradition in Sri Lanka to have Dhamma schools on Sundays where we teach the young the basic teachings of the Buddha and encourage them to become practising Buddhists. I am happy that Dhammakaya Foundation is following the same approach encouraging the learning of Dhamma through World Peace Ethic contests.

I am very encouraged that Dhammakaya foundation has expanded its activities to many countries including Sri Lanka. I congratulate the Dhammakaya foundations for having these contests for the third consecutive time.

I sincerely believe the winners of awards today will become model citizens and help regenerate moral values based on Buddhist teachings.

May the Most Venerable Phrarajabhavanvisudh who inspired these contests live long to serve the cause of Buddhism and Buddhist ethics.

I wish you all good health and happiness with the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.