



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE PHILIPPINES,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AUSTRALIA AND SRI LANKA

WELCOMING CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Katunayake International Airport (Colombo, Sri Lanka)

Friday, 20 January 1995

*Madam President,
Madam Prime Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am deeply grateful to you, Madam President and Madam Prime Minister, and to all of you, for your warm welcome to Sri Lanka. For many years I had hoped to visit the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean", resplendent with natural beauty, the land of the *Mahavansa*, a nation proud of its ancient culture, a country known for its smiling, hospitable people like my predecessor Pope Paul VI, 25 years ago. I come *as a friend from Rome*, where two thousand years ago the venerable civilization which flourished in this country was known and esteemed. I come *as a pilgrim of good will*, with nothing but peace in my heart. I am keenly aware of your country's *rich spiritual heritage*, shown not only by the strength of your religious traditions but also by the *remarkable harmony and mutual respect which has flourished among the followers of the various religions*.

2. I wish my visit to be a sign of my profound esteem for all *Sri Lankans*. In particular I express my highest regard for the *followers of Buddhism*, the majority religion in Sri Lanka, with its Brahmaviharas, the four great values of *Metta, Karuna, Mudita* and *Upekkha*: loving kindness, compassion, sympathy and equanimity; with its ten transcendental virtues and the joys of the *Sangha* expressed so beautifully in the *Theragathas*. I ardently hope that my visit will serve to strengthen the good will between us, and that it will reassure everyone of the Catholic Church's

desire for interreligious dialogue and cooperation in building a more just and fraternal world. To everyone I extend the hand of friendship, recalling the splendid words of the *Dhammapada*: "Better than a thousand useless words, is one single word that gives peace".

The fact that religion plays such an important part in the life of the Sri Lankan people is everywhere manifested in your many places of worship and shrines: *Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian*. The events of daily life are coloured by a wide variety of religious observances. Religious beliefs inspire common values such as acceptance of others, dialogue, understanding in the search for truth.

3. It is my prayerful hope that as Sri Lanka strives for further social and economic development, your rich spiritual patrimony will help you to find a worthy balance between the pursuit of material progress, concern for the common good, and openness to the needs of the poor and the underprivileged. How urgently necessary it is for society to support families, to educate children in respect for others, and to defend the sacredness of life against every form of violence. May all Sri Lankans of good will be strong and persevering in their efforts to find a *just and peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict* which has scarred the life of the nation in recent times, with its victims, its destruction and its terrible aftermath of suffering. The most recent steps taken in this direction nurture the hope – which all people of good will share with you – that everyone involved will shun violence and will draw on your traditions of tolerance in pursuing a harmony born of reconciliation and full respect for the diversity of society's members.

4. Tomorrow I shall gather in prayer with the Catholic community of Sri Lanka in order to celebrate *the Beatification of Father Joseph Vaz*, a holy man and a man of peace, who won the respect of his contemporaries by his humility, goodness and tolerance. I am certain that in honouring the memory of this saintly priest, Sri Lanka's Catholics will be inspired to continue to work for reconciliation and peace in a spirit of service to all their fellow-citizens and in solidarity with them.

In thanking the Supreme Authorities of the State for their warm invitation to visit Sri Lanka on this occasion, I wish to assure everyone, of whatever religious, ethnic or cultural background, that the Beatification of the Servant of God Father Joseph Vaz, although principally a Catholic event, is at the same time a sincere tribute to the profound religious traditions of all the people of this land.

God bless Sri Lanka! May he grant you peace!

(Sinhalese: long life!)

(Tamil: greetings!)

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