

U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Sri Lanka National Day

Remarks

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Thank you, Ambassador Kariyawasam, for that kind introduction, and the honor of your invitation. And I must say that I'm incredibly excited to visit your beautiful country later this month and see the progress already made on our new embassy complex.

68 years ago today, Sri Lanka found itself in good company when it joined the rather exclusive club of great nations that chose the fourth day of the month to declare independence from the United Kingdom.

Like Sri Lankans are doing today, in a few months Americans will mark our anniversary of independence, when we will also remember the heroes and patriots of years past, and reflect on how far we've come in our long quest for a more perfect union.

And like Sri Lankans of today, Americans are still striving to address some of the very challenging problems that have long bedeviled us. Problems like poverty, discrimination, and injustice.

But Sri Lankans and Americans both understand that these problems can only be solved through the use of the ballot box, the voice of a free press, the strength of a healthy civil society, and the actions of an empowered citizenry that is committed to democracy, human rights, and progress for all.

Yes, our nations share many interests in global affairs, and that makes us strong partners. We also have many of the same core values, and face many of the same hard problems. And that, I believe, makes us strong friends. For, in the words of the Roman poet Sallust, "to like and dislike the same things, that is indeed true friendship."

We love to see our friends succeed, and the accomplishments of the Sri Lankan people and their government over the past year have made all of us rightly proud. You have held two open, free, and fair elections; co-sponsored, with the United States, a strong resolution at the UN Human Rights Council on human rights in Sri Lanka; ratified the

UN protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons; joined the Open Government Partnership, to make Sri Lanka's institutions more transparent, empower its citizens, and fight corruption; returned 1,300 hectares of land to their rightful owners in the Northern and Eastern provinces; and much more.

And we have strongly affirmed our friendship: boosting our assistance to the Sri Lankan people; sending several of our top diplomats to the country, including Secretary Kerry and Ambassadors Samantha Power and Thomas Shannon; welcoming Sri Lanka as a Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Partner; and, later this month, we will hold the inaugural U.S.-Sri Lanka Partnership Dialogue, which will strengthen our relationship across several key areas, including development, governance, energy, trade, and security. We're very much looking forward to hosting Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Samaraweera in Washington, and we expect to get a lot of good work done.

As you can see, much has been accomplished. However, as it is with every nation, including our own, much yet remains to be done. The Sri Lankan people, through the democratic process, have embraced the need for healing, reconciliation, and accountability, and your President, Prime Minister, and Opposition Leader have all made commitments to put an end to ill-will, hatred, and strife. And the United States is committed to helping you, in whatever way we can, to achieve these worthy goals.

The Sri Lankan government has more laudable ventures underway. Just the other week, it launched a website that will give the people a chance to participate in the process of constitutional reform. This marriage of technology and civic participation will be a trailblazing test case for the power of digital democracy. Your country will also hold local elections later this year, where the Sri Lankan people will have yet another occasion to give voice to their aspirations.

The world is watching Sri Lanka. Your solutions, if successful, can become the blueprint for future generations, in distant nations, who are trying to find their way back to peace, justice, and harmony.

Before the Ambassador and I spoke, we were all treated to a wonderful rendition of your national anthem. Like our own ode to independence, it celebrates the unique beauty and noble qualities of your nation and its people. It describes a country that is "plenteous in prosperity..." and, "in wisdom and strength renewed." Those phrases may have been written in the last century, but they are, I strongly believe, a very apt portrayal of Sri Lanka's destiny in this century.

Thank you again, and congratulations on the anniversary of your day of independence.