

President Chandrika Kumaratunga's first address to nation is to realize that beautiful dream. (1994, November 13). *The Sunday Times*.

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"To realise that beautiful dream"

Following is the text of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's first address to the nation:

"I assume office as the 4th President of Sri Lanka at a momentous turning point in the history of our nation. The people have overwhelmingly demonstrated their collective desire for democracy, for peace, for honesty and efficiency in governmental affairs and for an economic policy which would offer to everyone the privileges so jealously guarded by a handful of cronies and henchmen.

I have no words to express appropriately how deeply touched and overwhelmed I am, and how humbled at the expression of the immense confidence and faith the nation has shown in me and my government. The scale and dimension of the mandate that has been given to us, knows no parallel in the history of election in the democratic world. Yet, it is even more significant to note that all the people of Sri Lanka, in all their diversity have spoken in one loud and unswerving voice.

I take this opportunity to bow in homage before the courage, the political acumen and the quiet determination of our people in their resolve to triumph over the might of state terror and political victimisation. I also take this opportunity to pay homage to my father and to my mother for teaching me that honesty, sincerity and commitment to the people of our land was worth much more than all that money could buy. I also pay homage at this moment to my husband Vijaya for the courage and for the support that he gave me right through our political life together.

The unsurpassed dimensions of this victory cannot be understood merely in terms of an achievement of an individual or even of a political party. Our people are well aware that whatever strength of mind, heart and will I possess, are entirely at the service of the nation. I have long dedicated myself to the well-being of our country and today is an appropriate occasion for deep renewal of this commitment.

This victory, however, is not mine alone. It is the fruit of painstaking labour and resolve, by every segment of the Sri Lankan community, spread over the days of darkness which engulfed our land in

the recent past. The proportions of this victory are indicative of the extent to which the people of a country, properly motivated and enthused, can strive against overwhelming odds and achieve for themselves and for posterity emancipation from the harshest tyranny.

It is to the vast mass of our people who have contributed to, and kept alive in the face of terrific odds this struggle in the darkest era of our country's contemporary history, that I pay my warm and humble tribute on this occasion.

In the words of my father - S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike "the indomitable,, unconquerable spirit of our people" has proved strong enough to challenge, and eventually to prevail against the oppressive regime of the past 17 years.

It is appropriate at this time to take stock of the current national condition and to reflect on the reasons that underpin this avalanche of popular feeling.

The people of our country, in displaying their firm resolve to give me and the People's Alliance victory of this scale, signified their profound desire for change. Their vote is, in essence and above all else, a vote for change. The changes which Sri Lanka's electorate look forward to are as diverse as they are far-reaching.

Pre-eminent among the changes that our people yearn for is the rejection, absolute and uncompromising of violence and terror. They had endured in silence the pain of senseless killings and disappearances of their loved ones. During the era that spanned almost two decades, human life became incredibly cheap. State terror raised its ugly head and continued unabated on its destructive path.

A callous regime which looked upon political power solely as an instrument for the attainment of its narrow and selfish ends violated with impunity all canons of decency, equity and fair play and left behind a society groping for a sense of security and fulfilment in the absence of norms and values.

The people of Sri Lanka have said with patent clarity to all who care to listen, "gone are the days when might was right, when everything was negotiable, and when the state refined and streamlined all forms of organised violence." The verdict of the people was in favour of the supremacy of law, the enthronement of democratic ideals and values and the restoration of decency, morality and conscience to the process of government.

Our people have voted decisively against corruption and the abuse of power which had taken deep root and spread right through the social and political fabric of our nation. It had terribly debilitated every civilised institution we held sacred.

The people have demanded transparency and accountability in all spheres of government. They have insisted that political power is but a trust, morally justifiable only so long as it is used for purposes connected

with the well being of the people and the upliftment of their condition. We have brought to an end the age when politicians were a law unto themselves.

The country has endorsed in the most explicit terms, the measures which my government has already taken to wipe out political violence and state terror and to restore integrity and honour to the politics of the country. The crippling burden of a high cost of living and the economic hardships caused by inadequate employment opportunities and a variety of other evils which have bedevilled the economy, demand urgent action. We have been accustomed to an economic order which, in the name of an open economy, has enabled unconscionable benefits to accrue to a small coterie, while the rest of society languished in poverty and squalor. Essential services including health and education were woefully neglected.

One of the priority tasks of the new government is to ensure that our economy is truly free and competitive, and there is honesty and transparency in all transaction.

Clear development perspectives would ensure expanded and vigorous growth of national production, and thereby, the generation of new employment and income opportunities for our youth. Foreign investment will be encouraged and protected. We would also ensure that the benefits of this development will reach the poorer segments of our population through equitable and efficient distribution of income transfers and increased employment.

Our people have acted with extreme restraint, intelligence and political acumen in the face of strong efforts to push them into the abyss of dark, dangerous and vile attitudes or racial and religious bigotry and hatred. They have given a mandate for peace and human values. They have convincingly proved to the world that all the might of the bullet can be defeated by the ballot.

Their commitment to democracy is inimitably courageous. The youth of our nation have responded to our call to eschew violence and take up, with us, the banner of freedom, democracy, human decency and prosperity for all. We pay homage to the youth for placing their faith in our ability to deliver the goods.

The ravages of war in the Northern part of the country have inflicted an enormous toll in terms of loss of lives and resources. The verdict of our people in the recent elections leaves me in no doubt of the depth and intensity of their desire for peace. This must be, however, peace with honour for both parties to the conflict, for it to be strong and durable. My government and I will continue our quest for peace, recognising that the path is difficult and torturous. We will ensure that our approach to peace will fully address the necessity to safeguard and strengthen the rights of the Sinhala people while recognising dignity, self respect and quality of treatment for all communities. Convinced as we are of the gravely harmful effects of the Executive Presidential System of government on the vigour and vitality of the democratic way of life of our people, we have solemnly pledged to eradicate this blemish from the constitution of our country.

In dedicating myself and the government which I head to the accomplishment of these goals, I ask for the continued support and cooperation you have given us.

The hope and faith you have placed in us is the beacon which lights our path. The guidance and support you extended to us given us the courage and dedication to go on.

Let us together climb those unreachable heights let us realise that difficult but beautiful dream."

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Information Laboratories (Pvt.) Ltd.,  
69/7A, Attidiya Road,  
Ratmalana,  
Sri Lanka

Tel: +94-1-611061  
email: news@infolabs.is.lk  
BBS: +94-1-611160

