



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO SRI LANKA AND THE PHILIPPINES
(12-19 JANUARY 2015)

ARRIVAL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

International Airport of Colombo
Tuesday, 13 January 2015

[Multimedia]

Mr President,
Honourable Government Authorities,
Your Eminence, Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends,

I thank you for your warm welcome. I have looked forward to this visit to Sri Lanka and these days which we will spend together. Sri Lanka is known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean for its natural beauty. Even more importantly, this island is known for the warmth of its people and the rich diversity of their cultural and religious traditions.

Mr President, I extend to you my best wishes for your new responsibilities. I greet the distinguished members of the government and civil authorities who honour us by their presence. I am especially grateful for the presence of the eminent religious leaders who play so important a role in the life of this country. And of course, I would like to express my appreciation to the faithful, the members of the choir, and the many people who helped make this visit possible. I thank you all, from the heart, for your kindness and hospitality.

My visit to Sri Lanka is primarily pastoral. As the universal pastor of the Catholic Church, I have come to meet, encourage and pray with the Catholic people of this island. A highlight of this visit will be the canonization of Blessed Joseph Vaz, whose example of Christian charity and respect

for all people, regardless of ethnicity or religion, continues to inspire and teach us today. But my visit is also meant to express the Church's love and concern for all Sri Lankans, and to confirm the desire of the Catholic community to be an active participant in the life of this society.

It is a continuing tragedy in our world that so many communities are at war with themselves. The inability to reconcile differences and disagreements, whether old or new, has given rise to ethnic and religious tensions, frequently accompanied by outbreaks of violence. Sri Lanka for many years knew the horrors of civil strife, and is now seeking to consolidate peace and to heal the scars of those years. It is no easy task to overcome the bitter legacy of injustices, hostility and mistrust left by the conflict. It can only be done by overcoming evil with good (cf. *Rom* 12:21) and by cultivating those virtues which foster reconciliation, solidarity and peace. The process of healing also needs to include the pursuit of truth, not for the sake of opening old wounds, but rather as a necessary means of promoting justice, healing and unity.

Dear friends, I am convinced that the followers of the various religious traditions have an essential role to play in the delicate process of reconciliation and rebuilding which is taking place in this country. For that process to succeed, all members of society must work together; all must have a voice. All must be free to express their concerns, their needs, their aspirations and their fears. Most importantly, they must be prepared to accept one another, to respect legitimate diversities, and learn to live as one family. Whenever people listen to one another humbly and openly, their shared values and aspirations become all the more apparent. Diversity is no longer seen as a threat, but as a source of enrichment. The path to justice, reconciliation and social harmony becomes all the more clearly seen.

In this sense, the great work of rebuilding must embrace improving infrastructures and meeting material needs, but also, and even more importantly, promoting human dignity, respect for human rights, and the full inclusion of each member of society. It is my hope that Sri Lanka's political, religious and cultural leaders, by measuring their every word and action by the good and the healing it will bring, will make a lasting contribution to the material and spiritual progress of the Sri Lankan people.

Mr President, dear friends, I thank you once again for your welcome. May these days we spend together be days of friendship, dialogue and solidarity. I invoke an abundance of God's blessings upon Sri Lanka, the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, and I pray that its beauty may shine forth in the prosperity and peace of all its people.