

Hypocrisy and lies: Sri Lankan President Dissanayake at the UN General Assembly

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Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 25, Sri Lankan President Dissanayake ludicrously postured as a fighter against poverty and a campaigner for world peace.

Notwithstanding his false claims, the substance of Dissanayake's speech was a reaffirmation of his government's subservience to the imperialist powers, particularly the US and its support for the criminal Israeli regime.

Dissanayake's appearance at the UN General Assembly was his first visit to the US since assuming office a year ago as head of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power administration. Clearly anxious to have his photo taken with the US president, he did so even as Trump was illegally mobilising federal troops in Washington and intensifying his government's assault on basic democratic rights.

The Sri Lankan president told the General Assembly that poverty was "a tragedy as old as human civilization [and], has accompanied humankind on its journey through time." He cynically called on the assembled diplomats to "pay special attention to eradicating extreme poverty."

Dissanayake's proclamations were a pathetic attempt to cover up the reality that poverty in Sri Lanka has drastically worsened under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures initiated by the Wickremesinghe government and now being expanded by his own JVP/NPP administration.

Since Sri Lanka's debt default in 2022, real wages have plunged by 14 percent in the private sector and a staggering 24 percent in the public sector. On top of this, Dissanayake's privatisation program will eliminate tens of thousands of state sector jobs. At the same time, the government has slashed funding to

health, education and other essential services, driving working people into intolerable living conditions.

Over half the island's population is struggling to meet its basic needs. According to the latest World Bank figures, 22 percent of the population is living below the poverty line with another 10 percent just above it.

And while the Sri Lankan masses face grinding poverty, big business corporations are reporting increasing profits. Just a few days ago the Colombo stock market's All-Share Price Index hit an unprecedented high of 22,000.

But for Dissanayake, poverty and extreme social inequality—now at extreme levels in Sri Lanka and globally—are not the result of capitalist exploitation and private ownership of the means of production but a permanent feature of human civilisation.

The imperialist powers and their reactionary client rulers at the General Assembly, who speak for the respective national billionaires, must somehow transform themselves into philanthropists to "eradicate" poverty. Dissanayake and his JVP/NPP government share the same fears of all those attending the General Assembly, that the deep gap between rich and poor will erupt in mass struggles against the capitalist profit system that they all defend.

Dissanayake told the General Assembly that Sri Lankan voters had endorsed his party's "Thriving Nation, a Beautiful Life" election manifesto. But the JVP/NPP campaign, which included a series of empty pledges to improve living standards, was a pack of lies.

Having come to office, Dissanayake ditched his party's vacuous promises and began ruthlessly implementing IMF austerity measures.

Health expenditure has been cut from 410 billion rupees in 2024 to 383 billion in 2025, ensuring that Sri

Lankans continue to face worsening shortages of medicines, medical staff, equipment and a seriously deteriorating public hospital system.

Likewise, public education is badly underfunded with insufficient teachers and inadequate facilities.

Fully committed to the IMF's austerity measures, the JVP/NPP government has imposed a host of other harsh social measures, including high taxes on essentials, cuts to state subsidies and the corporatisation, privatisation or closure of state-owned enterprises, resulting in mass job destruction and cuts to wages and hard-won working conditions.

Having promised during its election campaign to abolish the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the Dissanayake government has used this repressive law against Ceylon Electricity Board workers fighting to defend jobs and conditions and against activists opposing the Israeli genocide. It also used the military to break national strike action by postal workers.

A leading representative of the JVP and its Sinhala-Buddhist supremacist agenda since the late 1980s, Dissanayake backed Colombo's almost three-decade communal war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to the hilt. Dissanayake cynically told the General Assembly, however, "I believe that we must awaken our conscience to oppose racism and religious extremism in protection of human rights and freedoms."

During his election campaign, Dissanayake made overtures to the Tamil community in the North and East, demagogically vowing to promote racial harmony and promising the return of land—seized during the civil war and occupied by the military—to their original owners. Those promises were ditched after the JVP/NPP took power and the military occupation of the Tamil-dominated North and East continues.

The JVP/NPP insists that the Sri Lankan military did not commit any war crimes during the almost three-decade war. Its foreign minister recently told the United Nations Human Rights Council that the JVP/NPP government opposed any international investigation into the actions of the military during the war.

Dissanayake went on to bemoan the death of tens of millions of people from inadequate healthcare when "hundreds of millions are spent on futile wars" and "hundreds of thousands of children are denied the right to an education, as millions are spent on invading

another's land."

Dissanayake did not mention a single government or political leader during his anodyne lament but called on the assembled diplomats to commit themselves "not to lead the world to another disaster" but to make the world a better place for the next generation.

This posturing is a fraud. In fact, the Sri Lankan government is integrating itself with US imperialism's preparation for war against China. Dissanayake has welcomed numerous senior US and Indian officials to Colombo, including Admiral Steve Koehler, commander of the US Pacific Fleet, and Donald Lu, US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia. In April, during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Colombo, the JVP/NPP government signed the first-ever formal defense agreement with India.

Referring to Israel's murderous ethnic cleansing war against the Palestinians in Gaza, Dissanayake was consistent with his regime's pro-Israeli and pro-US political line. He refused to utter the words "genocide" or "ethnic cleansing" during his speech, instead calling for equal acknowledgment of the "legal, security, and humanitarian concerns of Israel and the Palestinian people" and the bankrupt and reactionary two-state solution.

When scores of diplomats walked out in protest during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fascist speech to the General Assembly, a member of the Sri Lankan delegation remained seated along with the US, in a clear nod to Washington and its militarist agenda in the Middle East.

Lenin rightly called the precursor to the UN, the League of Nations, a "thieves' kitchen" pointing out that it served as a platform for imperialist powers and their lackeys to pursue their geopolitical aims. Dissanayake's speech was another demonstration that his government will serve these interests.



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