

Your Royal Highness, Hon. Lord Ahamed, Your excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Sisters,

Good Afternoon,

First of all I want to thank Your Highness and the foreign and the Commonwealth office for inviting me, and specially for giving me the opportunity to speak at this historical moment in this very special Palace. In 1960, When my Grandma send us her photograph taken near the walls of the Buckingham palace and my Mom was so proud to show it to the neighbors, I never dreamt that I will be lucky enough to let alone speak but to visit **the** most famous palace on earth.

My journey of peace building started when my second son who was a Sri Lankan military officer was reported missing in action on the 27th of September 1998, the day I call, the war was at my doorstep. I never looked back, during the height of the war, when no one was allowed to go in to the fighting areas I managed to convince the families of the missing soldiers to go to the jungles to meet the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, The women joined me because we all wanted to know what has happened to our children , and I led a 7 women delegation to the jungles and when I met the local leader, I told him that we came to see their claws and teeth, which made him laugh and enabled us to build a very cordial relationship. We were able to broker the ceasefire between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Not stopping at national level, I was able to work with many women across the globe through the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership and Women Waging Peace network and most recently with Women Mediators across the Commonwealth. Being a member of these groups gives me enormous courage as well we do learn from each other and share our strengths. . From Fiji to Columbia women at the grassroots work on prevention, conflict transformation peace building and post

conflict reconciliation with very little or no resources. . As we all know, Peace building is no easy task, Women around the world take immense risks in their work of peace building, and they also work in very harsh and dangerous surroundings, and most often alone.

Though there are very few examples of women at Formal Peace Talks, we do know that women bring a whole new perspective to the table. Like in Liberia, women have demonstrated their ability to bring positive results by silencing the guns. We also have examples of women in Commonwealth, in my own country, Hon. Madam Sirimavo Bandaranayake was able to mediate very successfully and stop an eminent war and massive destruction between India and China way back in 1960s. One have to always remember peace building is very hard work. Because we swim upstream in deep and unclear waters. Above all women's very valuable contribution to world peace is not recognized nor are they adequately resourced.

Your Royal Highness, Today will go down in history as a very special day for World Peace,, and will also mark the beginning of a new era for Women Peace and Security Agenda. Your deep commitment for this cause gives us immense hope and encouragement to do our work even better. I want to specially thank the government of United Kingdom for enabling us to come together as Women Mediators across the Commonwealth. We have very much hope that this network can play a crucial role in resolving conflicts within and beyond the Commonwealth.

We know that with deep commitment and hard work Women can, and will change the world. I would like to call upon the governments and donors to increase their support to women peace builders. Let's work together in making this world, a better place for us and our children to live.

Thank You.

Speech by Visaka Dharmadasa

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