

Bhikkhu Paññakāra at the UN

Speech yesterday at the UN Vesak in New York (2026)



"Good afternoon Your Excellencies,

Honorable Ambassadors, Venerable Members of the Maha Sangha, Respected Religious Leaders, Representatives of the United Nations, Ladies and Gentlemen, Brothers and Sisters around the world, I humbly offer my greetings to all of you on this sacred occasion of the International Day of Vesak.

Today, we gather here at the United Nations to honour the birth, enlightenment, and passing away of our Lord Buddha, a being whose message of wisdom, compassion, mindfulness, and peace continues to guide humanity more than twenty-six hundred years later.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Permanent Missions of Sri Lanka and Thailand, to the United Nations for organizing this meaningful commemoration, and to all nations and participants present here today.

Vesak is not only a celebration for Buddhists. It is also an opportunity for humanity to reflect deeply upon the condition of our world, our societies, and most importantly, the condition of our own hearts and minds.

In today's world, technologies and science have made remarkable developments. We can communicate across continents within seconds. We can cure diseases that were once fatal. We have built powerful systems of great complexity and efficiency.

Yet, despite all of this progress, many people continue to suffer deeply. We see conflict among nations. Division among communities. Fear among neighbours. Loneliness among individuals. And emotional suffering quietly carried within millions of hearts. Many people long for peace, yet struggle to find peace within themselves. This is why the teachings of the Buddha remain profoundly relevant today.

The Buddha taught that peace does not begin in governments or institutions alone. Peace begins within the human mind. A restless mind creates suffering. An angry mind creates division. A fearful mind creates harm. But a compassionate mind creates healing. A mindful heart creates understanding. And a peaceful individual can help transform families, communities, and even nations.

In Buddhism, we are taught that hatred cannot end hatred. Only compassion can end hatred. Only understanding can overcome fear. Only wisdom can guide humanity away from suffering. This truth remains as important today as it was thousands of years ago.

In our modern world, many people are searching for happiness in external things - status, wealth, recognition, or power. Yet often, even after achieving these things, the heart remains unsettled. Why? Because lasting peace cannot be purchased. It cannot be forced. It must be cultivated carefully through mindfulness, compassion, patience, and loving-kindness.

Peace is not passive. Peace is a practice. Peace is how we speak to one another. Peace is how leaders use their influence. Peace is how communities care for the vulnerable. Peace is how we treat all beings and nature itself. A peaceful world cannot be created by hearts filled with anger, greed, or hatred. For this reason, inner transformation is not separate from global transformation. They are deeply connected.

When we heal ourselves, we begin to heal the world around us. Peace must become action.

Peace must walk among the people. Step by step. Person by person. Nation by nation. Peace is built gradually through conscious action. No lasting peace can emerge from hatred or violence. True peace is built through understanding, patience, dialogue, and compassion.

Today, our world also faces another challenge — disconnection. Although humanity is more digitally connected than ever before, many people feel emotionally isolated. We have witnessed these many times at our temple in Fort Worth, Texas as well as on our Walk for Peace.

Young people especially are growing up in a world filled with noise, pressure, competition, and constant distraction. Many are searching for meaning. Many are silently struggling with anxiety, loneliness, and hopelessness. This is why compassion and mindfulness are no longer optional values for humanity. They are essential.

If we teach children only how to compete, but not how to care for one another, we risk creating a productive, yet suffering world. We must teach future generations not only intelligence, but mindfulness. Not only ambition, but kindness. Not only achievement, but humanity.

This responsibility belongs not only to governments or religious institutions. It belongs to all of us. Every parent. Every teacher. Every leader. Every community. Every nation.

The Buddha's teachings remind us that every human being possesses the capacity for compassion. Regardless of nationality, religion, race, language, or social status, all people wish to live free from suffering. All people wish to feel safe, valued, and loved. For this reason, interfaith understanding and mutual respect are deeply important in our world today.

Different traditions may use different words, symbols, and practices, yet many spiritual paths ultimately encourage compassion, peace, humility, service, and respect for life. We must learn not only to tolerate one another, but to genuinely listen to one another. Our future depends upon our ability to recognize our shared humanity.

The world does not need more hatred. The world does not need more greed. The world does not need more violence. The world needs compassion. The world needs wisdom. The world needs healing. The world needs peace.

As Buddhists, we are also reminded to extend compassion beyond humanity itself. We must protect nature. We must care for the animals. We must recognize the deep interconnection of all life. From a Buddhist perspective, all sentient beings share the experience of fear, pain, and the desire to live. Animals, like humans, seek safety, comfort, and freedom from suffering.

Yet in many parts of the world today, countless animals endure suffering through neglect, exploitation, and unnecessary harm. Industrial systems of food production, experimentation, and entertainment often treat animals as objects rather than living beings.

When we reflect deeply, we begin to see that Compassion cannot be selective. If compassion is genuine, it naturally extends beyond human boundaries. To cultivate kindness toward animals is not separate from cultivating kindness toward humans. It is part of the same moral and spiritual development. When we harm other

beings unnecessarily, we also lose our own sensitivity. When we protect life, we refine our awareness and strengthen our capacity for empathy. The Buddha's teaching of non-harming invites us to expand our circle of care as widely as possible. To understand that all life is interconnected is true wisdom.

Caring for animals is therefore not a secondary concern. It is part of cultivating a peaceful world. A society that respects life in all its forms is a society that moves closer to true harmony.

At the same time, our responsibility extends to the environment that sustains all beings. The Earth is not separate from us. It is the condition for our survival. When nature is degraded, all beings suffer. When ecosystems collapse, human society also becomes unstable. When humanity lives without mindfulness toward the environment, suffering eventually follows for all beings. Please know that caring for the Earth is also an act of great compassion.

Today, standing here at the United Nations, I believe there is still reason for hope. Hope exists whenever human beings choose kindness over hatred. Hope exists whenever nations choose dialogue over conflict. Hope exists whenever communities come together in mutual respect. And hope exists whenever humanity remembers that peace begins within.

On this sacred day of Vesak, may we reflect not only upon the enlightenment of the Buddha, but also upon our own responsibility to bring greater compassion into the world. May we not leave this gathering only speaking about peace. May we become peace for one another. May all nations live in harmony. May all communities live without fear. May all beings be free from suffering. May wisdom guide our actions. May compassion guide our hearts. May peace soon bloom throughout the world. And may you all be well, happy and peaceful.

