

Remarks by

Vera El Khoury Lacoueilhe
Chairperson of the Executive Board

Commemoration of the International Day of Vesak at UNESCO

23 May 2024, 6pm (Room II)

Venerable religious leaders,

The Honourable Minister of Education of Sri Lanka and Chairman of the Sri Lankan National Commission for UNESCO,

Madam Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Sri Lanka to UNESCO,

Madam Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences,

Mister Co-President of the Buddhist Union of France

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

I would like to begin by thanking Her Excellency Ms Manisha Gunasekera, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Sri Lanka to UNESCO, for her kind invitation to attend this important commemoration and to say a few words on this occasion.

As stated by the previous honourable speakers, in 1999, the United Nations recognized internationally the Day of Vesak in acknowledgement of its contribution to Buddhism, and today we are here to celebrate the 25th anniversary of this proclamation.

At its 219th session, the Executive Board examined an item entitled “*Commemoration of the International Day of Vesak at UNESCO*” that was submitted by the Permanent Delegation of Sri Lanka with the support of many other Member States. The decision taken by the Board is testimony to the relevance of Vesak to UNESCO’s mandate in fostering intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, peaceful co-existence and tolerance in the world.

I would like to commend Sri Lanka, and especially you dear Manisha, for its leadership in uniting so many Member States in support of this decision, that was adopted by consensus.

Dear friends and guests, Vesak isn't just a festivity—it's a dive into togetherness and Buddha's story. It's about celebrating his birth and enlightenment, but also commemorating his passing.

Picture this: streets packed with people wearing white during the day, then bursting with colour at night as Buddhist homes light up with lanterns. It's like walking through a rainbow forest!

To witness this spectacle is to participate in a pilgrimage of the senses, where the air is thick with the fragrance of incense and the echo of prayers. It's a mosaic of tradition, spirituality, and communal joy—a glimpse into the very soul of a spiritual community, inviting us to embrace the beauty of unity and the transformative power of collective reverence.

Peace, understanding and a vision of humanity that supersedes national or international differences are essential today and always.

These are words that resonate particularly well in the house that aims to bring peace through education, culture, science and communication. But the shadows cast by the events we are experiencing in today's world make this message much, much more relevant today.

Thank you once again for organizing this wonderful event that brings together many important aspects of our Organization. My particular thanks go to the Honourable Minister who travelled to Paris to join us at this commemoration today.

Allow me to conclude by quoting the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Antonio Guterres, who expressed today his conviction that Buddha's timeless teachings of peace, compassion and service to others are the pathway to a better world for all.

Thank you.