**SPEECH BY H.E. MR. RONNY ABRAHAM, PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE “INTERNATIONAL DAY OF VESAK”**

**11 May 2017**

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I accepted this invitation to participate in this event marking the International Day of Vesak. This is the most sacred day to Buddhists, who commemorate the birth of the Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away. It is an honour to host this celebration for the first time in the Great Hall of Justice of the Peace Palace, seat of the International Court of Justice, in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 54/115 of 1999. With this Resolution, the General Assembly invited United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations duty stations to facilitate the observance of the Day of Vesak at their offices, in recognition of the contribution that Buddhism made and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity. Today’s commemoration is an opportunity to reflect on the philosophical and spiritual values of Buddhism and its universal message of peace.

On the occasion of last year’s celebration in New York, his Excellency Ban-Ki-moon, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, rightly noted that the Buddha’s message of peace and non-violence is echoed in the UN Charter. Pursuant to Article 1 of the Charter, one of the primary purposes of the United Nations is, I quote, to “bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.” In line with that goal, the Charter also provides that UN Member States, and I quote again, “shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.” On the basis of this principle, Article 33 of the Charter presents a list of means for the peaceful settlement of disputes between States, which includes negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and judicial settlement; among these means, the judicial settlement of disputes by the Court occupies a prime position.

As the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice plays a key role in maintaining international peace. The teachings of Buddhism find resonance in the Court’s mission which, according to Article 38 of its Statute, is to decide disputes submitted to it in accordance with international law. Through this mission, the Court contributes to international peace in different ways. The institution of proceedings before the Court often defuses tensions between the States involved and avoids further escalation of the dispute between them. Furthermore, the resolution of legal questions at issue between parties to a dispute is often instrumental in restoring pacific relations. More generally, the principles of international law developed by the Court often provide a basis for peaceful relations among States. Through its decisions, the Court thus makes a significant contribution to the quest for international peace and security and the peaceful settlement of disputes, as well as to the promotion and strengthening of the rule of law at the international level.

The intense judicial activity of the Court in the recent years testifies to the confidence that States place in the Court in fulfilling this important role. In 2017, four new applications instituting proceedings were filed so far before the Court, in cases dealing with a wide range of legal issues and involving States from Asia, Central America and Europe. The Court welcomes the continued commitment of States to settle their international disputes by peaceful means, and will continue to play its part in furthering the principles and goals of the UN, as enshrined in the Charter.

In a few moments, we will have the pleasure to listen to the inaugural guest lecture given by Dr. Christopher Pinto.

Let me conclude by thanking the Embassy of Sri Lanka in the Netherlands for organizing this event and extending me this kind invitation. I wish you all a joyful Day of Vesak.