DG’S REMARKS AT THE CEREMONY TO MARK THE DAY OF VESAK, 13 MAY 2015

* Most Venerable Bamungama Shantha Wimala Thero
* Excellencies,
* UN Colleagues,
* Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

It is an honor to be among you this morning to participate in this event to mark the Day of Vesak, and to reflect on the Buddha’s teachings. Fifteen years ago, the General Assembly recognized this Day to acknowledge the contribution that Buddhism has made to the spirituality of humanity for over two and a half millennia.

The Buddha's message of peace, compassion and love for all living beings is timeless and universal. In this era when violent extremism, division and hatred seem to be on the increase in our world, the Buddha’s teachings are more crucial than ever, and very relevant to the work and objectives of the United Nations.

I would like to thank the Sri Lankan High Commission and the Royal Thai Embassy for organizing this event, and for once again choosing UNON as the venue for this important commemoration ceremony.

I now have the honour of delivering the Secretary-General’s message for this Day, which reads as follows:

“On this Day of Vesak, I extend special greetings to the victims of the earthquake in Nepal, a country that was instrumental in leading the United Nations General Assembly to designate this observance. I hope that the Nepalese people observing this holiday amid the rubble are able to take some measure of comfort from its message of human solidarity.

The spirit of Vesak can help to animate a global response to the challenges of our day. As the United Nations works for the adoption this year of a set of

new sustainable development goals and a meaningful new agreement on climate change, we would do well to heed the Buddhist teaching that life and the environment are essentially one. And the Lord Buddha’s observation that all peoples are interconnected reminds us of the importance of uniting as one human family resolved to address our shared struggles based on common values.

I have asked members and leaders of all faith communities to join the United Nations in responding to the recent dangerous and destabilizing rise of violent extremism. Toward that end, we recently welcomed eminent figures from the world’s major religions to two days of meetings at the United Nations on promoting tolerance and reconciliation.

The imperative of transcending differences lies at the heart of Buddhist teachings, whose injunctions to practice compassion are timeless.

Let us celebrate Vesak Day with a pledge to care for the most vulnerable people in our societies and, in the process, create a better future for all.”

End of message.

Thank you for your kind attention.