

Presenting “Canada: A Mindful and Kind Nation” at the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Spirituality: Ethics and Values for the 2030 Agenda

September 22, 2020

My Dear Kindful Friends,

Good afternoon! I address you as Kindful Friends for a specific reason which I hope will become apparent to you all shortly.

Let me start by warmly welcoming you - I hope all of you are well and happy! Thank you to the organizing committee for inviting me to speak at this United Nations conference. A special thank-you to Dr. Joshua Cooper for thinking of me and extending such a warm invitation.

As you heard, my name is Bhante Saranapala, the Urban Buddhist Monk, Founder and President of “Canada: A Mindful and Kind Nation.”

I am standing here before you today because I have a goal and vision for this country, and the role we can play on a global stage during these difficult and challenging times. My vision is to realize a time when each nation can carry into the world a new title. A badge of honour which they can wear more proudly than any medallion won through war or conquest. I envision a world where every country is a Kindful Nation, which starts with the simple practice of mindfulness, and kindness. As global citizens we all have a prime duty to share our views and ideas for a sustainable, peaceful, happy, healthy and kind world. Our exchange of views and ideas are based on good faith, mutual understanding and respect for one another. We source our ideas and values from many different touchpoints within our culture, be it our parents, friends, families, media, educational systems, religious institutions, or collective norms.

I would be remised to not acknowledge at the outset that my own cultural and religious lens has influenced and shaped by life experience, and in turn, my lens has been transformatively altered at various stages in life through the world around me. However, what I share with you today is not rooted in one particular religious, class, creed, or culture. No country has a monopoly on joy, peace, and love.

I would like to share with you today the principle of kindness for a better, happier, healthier, kinder and more peaceful and mindful nation and world. It has been my experience that kindness can connect us at a time when we have never felt more disconnected. It can unite us when disharmony has seeped its way into the very fabric of how we communicate. Kindness has the power to make a country and the world more peaceful and harmonious.

Although some of you may have an idea about this word kindness, it may also seem abstract. I want to spend just a bit of our time together today shifting our perception. I want you to leave seeing how kindness and mindfulness can be integrated into a simple and practical tool for reflecting on our shared lived experiences as we traverse the new and untamed reality.

Kindfulness comes from two words: kindness and mindfulness. This is a word coined by the Venerable Ajahn Brahm. By using this word I am introducing a new principle for all to build a mindful and kind nation. The kindness principle is *be mindful to be kind to yourself and be mindful to be kind to others*.

I had the vision of calling every country a kindful nation for over two decades. As a Buddhist monk I had the great privilege of receiving mindfulness and kindness training from my great masters and I was practicing mindfulness and kindness from my teen life together with various groups. From these kindness works and programs I saw a positive change in the behaviours of all participants. Thus, I wanted to expand the kindness work beyond for the greater benefit of all.

During my time speaking in Canada, USA, Europe and Asia on mindfulness meditation, kindness, peace, happiness and wisdom, I would inject this idea into speeches before people from all walks of life. I am very delighted to tell you that people from all cultural and religious backgrounds were thrilled and joyous at hearing this principle, signalling an affirmation to me that this is not a practice which is rooted in one particular culture, but one that can transcend differences. Many years of exploring the significance of calling a country a mindful and kind nation led me to officially call “Canada: A Mindful and Kind Nation.”

Together with two board members, Michael Weldon and Jenny Kim, I had the great privilege of officially registering this organization as a non-profit in 2017 with the following vision and mission statements:

- First, Making Canada a more mindful and kinder nation
- Second, Promoting mental health through mindfulness meditation and kindness practice
- Finally third, Building a healthy nation with healthy minds

We do this by:

1. Bringing awareness of beneficial values in people;
2. Promoting physical and mental fitness and mental health;
3. Promoting a way of life based on tolerance, concord, and kindness;
4. Promoting goodwill and harmony in action, speech, and thought;
5. To make Canada the happiest, healthiest, kindest and the most peaceful nation through mindful meditation
6. To lead by example, as a Mindful Nation, and collaborate with other nations to shape a more Mindful World

It is not just Canada, we can call every country a mindful and kind nation. Even United Nations can be called United Kindful Nations. Although we possess cultural and religious differences, all nations can be united with kindness for a happy, healthy, mindful, kind, harmonious and peaceful world!

Let me bring your attention to a great saying. Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Mahathero, a great thinker of Sri Lanka, once said, “Without shaping the man, a country cannot be shaped. Therefore, let’s take the action to shape the man. Then, let’s take the action to shape the country.”

My Kindful Friends,

The aforementioned statement resonates with a book authored by an American psychologist in 1960s. The title is “I’m OK, You’re OK.” How are we going to shape a country as a mindful and kind nation? I believe we can shape and make the human OK with kindness.

1. The first component of mindfulness: Do mindfulness meditation every day for 30 minutes, at least for 15 minutes
2. The second component of kindness: Do an act of kindness every day, or at least once a week.

This is called kindness practice. This kindness practice is done not just for others. Regarding it in this way may make it seem like a chore which needs to be completed. Nor is it done just for oneself. Regarding it in that way may make it seem trite and selfish. The kindness practice benefits us all by creating an atmosphere of trust and harmony. In other words, kindness benefits oneself and others and it will heal you and it will heal others! Indeed, kindness practice will heal a nation!

Richard Davidson, an American neuroscientist, once said that “No matter what kind of painful and difficult life we had in the past, we can go for positive changes. The positive changes can be measured. In order to bring a positive change, we must train ourselves with a new way of thinking.”

My Kindful friends,

I am presenting you this new way of thinking, that is kindness thinking !

We, the citizens, are the family, neighbourhood, society, country, nation and the world. If we can choose to become kindful, or to be mindful and kind, a family, neighbourhood, society, country, nation and world will be kindful or mindful and kind. A Kindful, or a mindful and kind, nation begins with you and it begins with parents: kindful I, Kindful you, kindful we. kindful boyfriend, kindful girlfriend, Kindful friends and colleagues. Kindful husband. Kindful wife. Kindful spouses, Kindful parents. Kindful kids. Kindful brothers and sisters. Kindful grandparents. Kindful grandchildren. Kindful family. Kindful friends and colleagues. Kindful employers and employees. Kindful presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers, MPs, Kindful schools. Kindful neighbourhood. Kindful society. Kindful country and nation. Kindful world.

Through our daily, weekly, monthly and annual kindness programs, for instance, sharing-is-caring program, mindfulness meditation sessions, mindful and kindful conversations, Kindful Canada Symposiums, we are making a great awareness as to how a person can become the magnet of kindness. If every citizen of a country becomes a magnet of kindness, it will attract all kindful people. Thus, a kindful nation. If every global citizen chooses to become

mindful and kind, the entire world will become mindful and kind. Just as a flower full of nectar attracts a bee, in the same way we become the flowers full of the nectar of kindness and sweetness to attract people near and far who wish to partake in the sweetness of kindness !

KINDFULNESS EDUCATION

As we all know education is the foundation. While we are taking the action to educate ourselves with kindness and mindfulness, we also take the actions to educate children who are our next generation. If we can instill in the youth this principle of kindness, I believe we can hope and dream for a mindful and kind family environment, society, country and world. Kindful kids will never bully other kids.

Let us teach students from kindergarten to university to be mindful to:

1. Embrace oneself with kindness
2. Embrace others with kindness
3. Embrace a country with kindness
4. Embrace the world around them with kindness

Building a mindful and kind nation begins with a citizen of a country. Every individual has some emotional issues like anger, hatred, selfishness, stress, anxiety, depression, fear and guilt. If these issues are not taken care of, this will lead to ongoing and internalized problems leading to self-harm and harming others. Through the modern education system, let us train a citizen in mindfulness meditation and kindness practices. Feed your mind with healthy emotions and thoughts. Train yourself to do an act of kindness for others. Always be mindful to be kind to feed oneself with mindfulness and kindness. To be mindful means to remember. In other words, don't forget. During difficult times, don't forget to empower yourself with confidence in this practice of mindfulness and kindness. Always recollect that as human beings we have the power to heal ourselves and others through kindness and compassion.

Embracing oneself with kindness is very essential. Being kind should not be considered a weakness. In fact, it is a great strength. Though hardened clay may be tougher than playdough, it is the clay mug that breaks first when it drops, while the playdough simply molds to what is necessary of it. Kindness is resilience, not weakness. Kindness is good for you and it is good for everyone. Kindness makes one feel good. Kindness makes others feel good. By embracing kindness, an individual can live a healthy, happy, peaceful and harmonious life.

When others go through emotional struggles, let us train ourselves to treat and embrace them with kindness and mindfulness. If we can continue to treat and embrace one another with kindness and mindfulness, we can not only defuse tension, pain and suffering, but we can also promote peace and happiness. Through my mindful conversations and mindfulness meditation sessions I was able to help save the lives of many people who were in deep states of depression. Now, they are offering the same help to whoever they know going through the same emotional struggles.

Dear Kindful Friends,

Every individual has two sides: a positive side and negative side, charged like an atom. Embracing negative values like anger, hatred, unappreciation, ungratefulness will lead to darkness filled with negativities, troubles, problems, restlessness, turmoil, violence, conflict and war. Embracing positive values like love, compassion, kindness, appreciation, gratefulness will lead to brightness filled with peace, harmony, love, kindness, compassion, fulfillment, tranquility, calm and happiness. *This transformation should be brought about inside out not outside in.* Inner transformation will help bring positive change in the environment and the world.

Education is the foundation. If we can educate individuals to adopt the principle of kindness for one's health and well-being, I believe a personal change will take place for a brighter life and future. The first teachers of a child are the parents. Parents can instill or plant the seeds of kindness into the tender hearts of children. Kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, high school teachers, and of course college and university teachers can teach values of kindness and every student should be taught the lessons of kindness. Kindness sessions should be offered to students at home as well as at schools. Mindfulness meditation session should be conducted for all students. In university level, a kindness course can be offered. Or, even launching a new department for the study of kindness in post-secondary education. The kindness course can cover various values like, morality, meditation, happiness, health, peace, light and wisdom.

Because of me, let nobody suffer! Because of me, let everyone be happy!

By and large we get hurt because of other's unmindful and unkind actions. Or, others get hurt because of our unmindful and unkind actions. Let us be mindful to recognize what our unmindful/unkind actions are, and what others' unmindful/unkind actions are which hurt all of us. Let us recognize all physical, verbal and mental negative actions. If we know that unmindful/unkind and negative behaviours hurt us and them, then let us be kind to abstain from such actions. Let's be mindful to shift our attention to physical, verbal and mental mindful/kind, positive behaviours.

As kindness practice, let us train ourselves and others to be mindful in four steps as follows:

1. Be generous and share
2. Speak kind words
3. Do something good for others
4. Remember to treat everyone with equality and liberality

Can we hope for a mindful and kind nation? Yes, I strongly believe we can. Let's be mindful of these four things: behaviour, habit, attitude and mentality. Unkind behaviour, unkind habit, unkind attitude and unkind mentality are going to make an individual unkind. These four things will not only make an individual unhealthy and unhappy, they will also make a nation unhealthy and unhappy.

Kind behaviour, kind habit, kind attitude and kind mentality are going to make an individual kind. These will make an individual healthy, happy and peaceful. Thus, a country as a whole will be healthy, happy and peaceful !

First take care of yourself. Then you can take care of others, just like wearing a face mask to protecting both ourselves and others. All enlightened masters first took care of themselves. They made themselves okay first. They have taken the responsibility of changing their negative sides. They were mindful and came to realization that fundamental roots behind all struggles, problems, pains and sufferings are laying within. They took action to change themselves. They took the bright side of their life.

KINDFULNESS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Modern neuroscientists and psychologists have done extensive research into mindfulness meditation and they have published their books. As I mentioned already, Richard Davidson's publication in the Time Magazine that we all can become happy. The tools we need is the kindness practice. Through two decades of doing spiritual counselling, I was able to help people from all walks of life take responsibility over their negative tendencies and implement positive change. I helped people learn to shift their perspectives towards new ways of thinking that would yield beneficial effects on their lives, and the lives of those around them. I have encouraged others to consider being kind during their most challenging and difficult times. Once they have chosen to embrace kindness, mindfulness meditation and kindness practice, their life began to change for a positive direction.

Our global body, the United Nations, is an amazing global power house. The UN has been established to help every nation. The words "united" and "nations" implies collective unity. An agreed upon set of values which govern the way these nations relate to each other. Ask yourselves, "how can we be advocates of unity? How can we further embody that upon which the very name of this collective is predicated?"

We the nations can be united with so many principles. We have a moral duty to make an awareness of good values for the sake of unity and peace of the world. If every citizen of a nation chooses to be mindful and kind, a nation will certainly be mindful and kind. If every country chooses to be a mindful and kind nation, then we can expect a mindful and kind world. In my public speaking and during our annual Kindful Canada Symposium, I was making an awareness to the public that one day I would like to call United Nations "United Kindful Nations" (UKN). All nations united with kindness which is kindness and mindfulness. There are differences, different, practices, views and perceptions. Despite these differences I am of the view that every global citizen can become mindful and kind for a healthy, happy and peaceful life, nation and the world! This starts with each of you, taking up the mantle of kindness.

Thank you.