

RYS: UN International Youth Day 2026 in Akurala, Galle District, Sri Lanka

Alvin Pang
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This celebration was organized to commemorate United Nations International Youth Day (IYD) 2026 and honor the landmark 40th Anniversary of the Religious Youth Service (RYS). Aligning directly with the global IYD 2026 theme, 'Different Contexts, Common Aspirations,' this initiative addressed the critical need for interreligious reconciliation and youthful solidarity in Sri Lanka. While participants arrived from vastly diverse contexts, ranging from young local high school prefects to international professionals from Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Australia, and India, they stood united by their common aspiration for peace.



This event was highly significant for UPF as a tangible demonstration of its foundational value: 'We are One Human Family created by God.' By combining physical service, specifically a village water restoration project, with character-based leadership education, the activity proved that youth can successfully bridge national, linguistic, and religious divides.

The International Youth Day program commenced on August 12, 2026, in Dodangoda, Kalutara, with the arrival of participants, local dignitaries, and the Chief Guest, the Honorable Maithripala Sirisena, the 7th President of Sri Lanka. The morning assembly opened with deep spiritual solemnity, as representative prayers were offered by youth from five distinct faiths: Buddhist, Hindu, Islam, Christian, and Unificationist.



Dr. Chula Senaratne, Secretary General of UPF Sri Lanka, welcomed the delegates and highlighted the rich legacy of RYS on the island since 1991. Following a vibrant traditional dance, Ms. Ursula McLackland, President of UPF Asia-Pacific, delivered an inspiring introduction to UPF and RYS. She emphasized the core philosophy of 'Living for the Sake of Others' and highlighted the long-standing personal support and close relationship that President Sirisena has generously given to UPF peace initiatives. Following this, Mr. Alvin Pang, representing RYS Global, read the UN Secretary-General's message on youth solidarity, and John Cornell and Janidu performed a heartwarming acoustic musical set.



The presence of the President deeply moved the participants, with local students noting that standing beside a former head of state gave them unprecedented validation and confidence.

The celebration successfully bridged international and local networks, consolidating partnerships between UPF Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and Sri Lanka Youth. To ensure continuous leadership, participants were actively encouraged to return home to organize local service projects,

ensuring the trust restored in Sri Lanka continues to ripple across the globe.

