

RYS Sri Lanka: Former Sri Lankan President Inspires Youth Day Celebrants

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Akural, Sri Lanka – In the beautiful coastal town of Akurala, in Galle district of Sri Lanka, UPF-Sri Lanka and Religious Youth Service (RYS) hosted a program to celebrate International Youth Day on August 12, 2026. The program was graced by the participation of **Hon. Maithripala Sirisena**, the seventh president of Sri Lanka, who attended as the chief guest.



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 UPF and RYS on the island since 1991. Following a vibrant traditional dance, **Mrs. 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 **Mr. John Cornell**, RYS senior alumnus from the United States, performed a heartwarming acoustic musical set with musician **Janidu**.



The crowning highlight of the day was the keynote address by President Sirisena, who spent more than two hours in direct, warm engagement with the youth. Demonstrating immense humility and genuine desire to share his life experiences with the youth, the former president met with the RYS delegates, listened to their worksite testimonies, and took photos with every single participant and staff member. This beautiful gesture left a permanent mark on the participants, validating their identity as young peace builders.



The presence of the president deeply moved the participants, with local students noting that standing beside their former head of state gave them unprecedented validation and confidence, while international delegates praised the down-to-earth humility of the former president during his two-hour engagement.

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. Outstanding initiatives will receive seed funding and be showcased on the UPF website.