There are very few words of praise that one can confer upon Jayantha Dhanapala that he has no doubt heard many times before. Nevertheless, I work in the field of disarmament and have grown accustomed to confronting monumental challenges. So I must now find some fresh words to express why I truly believe he deserves to receive the Simons Foundation’s “Award for Distinguished Global Leadership in the Service of Peace and Disarmament.”

The long list of formal reasons for his receipt of this Award is familiar to all who work in the field of disarmament – indeed, to all who practice the fine art of multilateral statesmanship. Many people remember his role as President of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, which ultimately resulted in the indefinite extension of the treaty.

His actions and statements at the time indicate that his contribution was somewhat greater than just defending an existing treaty – he was actually advancing the international rule of law. I say this because the final outcome of that conference also included a set of principles and objectives for non-proliferation and disarmament, a set of standards for a strengthened review process, and a Middle East Resolution. All together, these were intended to ensure that all of the treaty would be implemented, not just parts of it.

His many other accomplishments as the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs also reflect his deep commitment to multilateralism, the central role of the United Nations, and the abiding importance of the Charter’s fundamental principles and objectives. All of his work – both inside and outside the Secretariat – reflected a vision of a world united by common interests, facing common predicaments, and recognizing the need for cooperative solutions to common problems.

I know that Jayantha’s distinctive world-view is very deeply rooted. In 1956, he represented his country at the World Youth Forum, having won a national competition by writing an essay on the theme, “The World We Want”. I must admit that a few years earlier I too represented my own country at that same Forum, having written an essay on the same topic.
Perhaps the best tribute I can make to Jayantha on this happy occasion is to recall what the great American writer, William Faulkner, said upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949. At the banquet on his behalf, he said:

*I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work -- a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust.*

To me, these words effectively convey the real reasons why Jayantha has truly earned this Award. He has devoted a life in the service of the greater good. He has achieved much in the pursuit of this noble goal. I have little doubt that he will indeed hold this Award in trust, while continuing to work tirelessly in the service of peace and disarmament in our troubled world.

I would like to close by thanking the Simons Foundation for its own contributions to the human spirit by creating this Award and by actively supporting the efforts of civil society and the United Nations to advance the great goals of disarmament. You surely deserve to be the next recipient of your own Award.