

ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala is the first Sri Lankan, and first Sri Lankan woman to summit Mount Everest (8,848m/29,030ft), a double record she achieved at 5:03am on 21 May 2016. She is a mountaineering professional and women's rights advocate. Her passion for adventure is balanced with her passion for gender equality. Since 2003, she has been professionally involved with the sport of rock climbing as an instructor, while simultaneously working full-time as a women's rights advocate.

Jayanthi is currently serving as the first ever Goodwill Ambassador for Women's Rights for the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Jayanthi holds an undergraduate degree in English Literature from the Delhi University (2003), and won a full scholarship to the University of Sussex, UK, to follow her MA in Gender Studies.

Jayanthi has extensive experience in rock climbing and mountaineering which spans across nine countries and includes two month-long training programmes in mountaineering, conducted by the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) in India where she obtained an 'A' Grade. It was here that she first gained her technical skills in rock and ice climbing, crevasse rescue, high altitude first aid, as well as expedition planning. In 2012, she successfully summited Mt. Imja Tse (Island Peak – 6,189m) in the Nepali Himalayas; in 2014, she summited Mt. Kilimanjaro (5,895m) in Tanzania. Jayanthi's career has also involved working with women's rights organizations in Sri Lanka. This has provided her with extensive practical knowledge and experience in the field of women's rights and gender.

On many occasions, locally, regionally, as well as globally, Jayanthi has been invited to make presentations on the status of women in Sri Lanka: this has included advocating for women's rights at the United Nations. Prior to setting off on the Everest Expedition, Jayanthi worked as the Gender Specialist at CARE International Sri Lanka, working on a project to reduce gender based violence (GBV) in the tea plantations.

Jayanthi aims to combine her experience and skills in gender and rock climbing by establishing the latter as a sport in Sri Lanka, with the specific goal of increasing the participation of women and girls in this activity.