

United Nations: Today and Tomorrow

Address by
**Dr. Srgjan Kerim, President-Elect of the 62nd Session
of the United Nations General Assembly**

at the United Nations University

Tokyo, 24 August 2007

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Friends,

When considering what I should talk to you about today, the most natural topic that came to mind, both given the pace of change in today's world and the challenges of my new position, fell under the heading "United Nations: Today and Tomorrow." And as it turns out, an avid promoter of the idea of the advancement of humanity and one of the first delegates to the UN, Eleanor Roosevelt, wrote a book with exactly that title – "United Nations: Today and Tomorrow". In it, she predicted that with the passage of time the UN would only grow in importance. That was more than half a century ago. And she was right.

Since then, the UN has survived the stresses of six difficult decades. From its very inception it has sought to embody the Kantian ideal of perpetual peace – even if putting such a utopian idea into practice has far too frequently been an exercise in frustration. But it is in the worst storms that a guide for navigation is the most important. That it has survived throughout six decades is a measure of the UN's importance in its own right.

And the measure of the UN's continuing importance is how it tackles the great questions upon which the idea of perpetual peace rests today: How to tackle climate change; how to achieve more balanced and sustainable development, including the Millennium Development Goals; and how to combat terrorism, while all along ensuring and promoting human rights, the rule of law and equality and understanding among human beings. These are also the issues that are going to be **my top priorities** during my presidency.

If there is a truly global challenge that affects all humankind then it is **climate change**. It has implications for every nation, no matter whether it is rich or poor, big or small, landlocked or an island state and whether it is situated in the Northern or Southern Hemisphere. It concerns all of us on this planet, although the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change show that the world's poor will suffer disproportionately. Therefore the issue also has a major ethical dimension. And all human activities you can think of are related to the change of our climate: economic development, energy, trade, health, agriculture and food security, tourism, peace and security, disaster response and many others. That is why the United Nations as the

global organization is in a unique position to deal with this challenge. That is why I have chosen “Responding to Climate Change” as a theme for the debate of the General Assembly which starts on the 25th of September.

In the upcoming negotiations under the UNFCCC - that is the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change – states will try to find an agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gases, adaptation measures and financing and technology transfer for the period after the expiration of the Kyoto Protocol. I note that Japan has taken a leading role with its commitments and its national strategy before the next Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC starts in Bali in December, as demonstrated in Prime Minister Abe’s proposal “Cool Earth 50”.

Another aspect that is especially important for our work in New York is the question of how the UN system as a whole, its various agencies, funds and programs shall react to the challenge of climate change. I think here the General Assembly has an important role to play in shaping the responses of the UN family to a lasting phenomenon that substantively affects all of the UN’s activities. Just think of the need for better preparedness against more floods, precautionary measures against the spread of heat-related diseases or responses to more droughts in Africa. My intention is to consult with experts from business, NGOs, academia and the UN itself on ways how the UN can do a better job to find solutions in these different fields.

Another danger that can only be defeated in a collaborative way and with a concerted effort is **international terrorism**. As we have seen, terrorism has a corrosive effect, one which can obliterate the dividing line between peace and war, but which can also corrode the rule of law within and between societies. Thus an effective response must be multi-faceted and global, but also measured and responsible. The UN as a global organization bringing together 192 states of course has an important role to play, and its role should be further strengthened.

Symbolic yet important progress on this issue was achieved at the UN summit in 2005, where the world’s leaders consensually condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The UN global strategy on counterterrorism has taken a step further. Now our task is to put this strategy into practice. How to do it most effectively will be the focus of the review discussion that will take place during the 62nd UNGA. Currently Member States are negotiating a draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism. If successfully negotiated, the convention would be an important complement to the existing framework of international anti-terrorism instruments. There is also hope that progressive implementation of the strategy will help advance the negotiation process.

As we tackle the challenges of fighting terrorism we must always remember that we should not jeopardize the important and hard-won achievements of human civilization. I am referring to internationally accepted human rights standards and the rule of law. A false, or at least outdated, Hobbesian dilemma between security and personal freedoms can be surpassed through well-thought out ways of combating terrorism and addressing its root causes.

The globalization of the world’s economy has removed many barriers in the access of resources worldwide. In an ideal world, this would bring opportunity and benefits to

all. But while there are some encouraging results, especially in Latin America, China and India, globalization's benefits remain very unevenly distributed. The challenges facing South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are enormous. In light of such developments we must renew our commitment to achieve the **Millennium Development Goals**, and stay on a course of fighting poverty, exclusion, illiteracy, disease, including HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality. This is our moral obligation and is an imperative of development.

Many of the world leaders that in 2000 pledged to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and some of those who reaffirmed their commitment to the goals in 2005 are not in office any more. Thus, our call for a re-commitment to achieving these goals is timely, and furthermore underlined by the results that were achieved so far.

Still, we are currently already half-way to the date set for the achievement of these ambitious goals, and unfortunately the picture is at best mixed. Whether we get anywhere near fulfilling them will depend crucially on how we provide for their **financing**. This is why financing for development is also one of most important priorities of the General Assembly. During its 62nd session it will hold a High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development and also conduct intergovernmental consultations with the participation of all Member States and the major institutional stakeholders involved in the financing for development process. The dialogue and the consultations will form a part of the preparatory process for the Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to take place in 2008, at which the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus will be reviewed.

Attention to **gender equality**, the empowerment of women and the special needs of children is an important part of developmental goals. Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is key to the advancement of development, peace and security and human rights for all. A proposal is on the table for a new entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women that is to merge three separate entities of the UN. The process of building new gender architecture to better address the many and urgent needs for improving the situation of women around the world is going to be given my particular attention.

The 2002 UN Special session on **children**, which was the first special session devoted to children, was an important step forward for the rights and protection of children. The final document "A World Fit for Children" set ambitious goals aimed at improving the situation of children as regards their health, education and protection against abuse, exploitation and violence. How much has been achieved in the five years since the special session and what should be the priority areas for future action will be assessed during the 62nd session of the General Assembly at its commemorative plenary meeting in December. The mid-decade review will devote special consideration to the needs and rights of children living in poverty. We know that chronic poverty remains the single biggest obstacle to meeting the needs and protecting and promoting the rights of children. Therefore the protection of underprivileged children should as a matter of urgency address this root-causes of their despair and I will attend to it with particular concern.

HIV/AIDS continues to constitute a global emergency and poses one of the greatest challenges to the development, progress and stability. While the national and international efforts have yielded some important results in fighting HIV/AIDS, much remains to be done as a matter of emergency. To this end, a comprehensive HIV/AIDS review will take place in 2008 to assess the progress on Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Increasingly global currents of information and commerce are also bringing **cultures and religions** of the world closer together. However, there is always a risk that these encounters could end up in incomprehension and intolerance. The only way to avoid such misconceptions and to promote cultural and religious diversity, tolerance and mutual understanding is through dialogue. This is why the General Assembly is devoting special attention to such dialogue. It is going to hold a High-level Dialogue on Inter-religious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace in October. Promoting such a dialogue can only be successful if it involves a wide-range of participants and is as all-encompassing as possible. To this end both high representatives of member states as well as representatives of civil society are invited to take part in the dialogue, including representatives of non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

The combating of environmental degradation and terrorism, the achievement of a just and balanced development and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the issues of human rights, gender equality and mutual understanding – these are the great questions of our time and will be important priorities of the UN General Assembly during my term as its President.

We must waste no time and must make every effort to tackle these issues, and tackle them successfully. Clearly, in order to be able to address them the UN has to adapt, and continue its management reforms and the reform of its institutions to better reflect the composition and needs of today's world. That is why UN reform is also going to be a major focus of my attention during my term as the president of the UN GA.

The **revitalization of the General Assembly** has been an on-going process since 1991. The aim of the process is to enhance its role and authority as well as effectiveness and efficiency. Some of the revitalization issues are also related to further improving its working methods and procedures, streamlining its agenda and strengthening its technical support. Further, the repeated demands for an enhancement of the General Assembly's role has to do with a growing sentiment among its membership of an "encroachment" of its responsibilities by the Security Council. In any case, the institution of the General Assembly can best be revitalized through the substance of its work. Through setting an agenda where the truly important questions are raised and the directions and norms for their resolution are established.

The **reform of the Security Council** is an essential but also extremely complex area of reform. While there is no consensus on the various formulas that have been put forward as to how to change the present composition, there is an agreement that reform of the Security Council is essential for making its decisions more legitimate and representative of the geopolitical realities of today's world. The latest reports

drawn up on behalf of the President of the General Assembly concluded that under the present circumstances, Member States should explore emerging ideas concerning a transitional approach to Security Council reform as a possible way forward. This new intermediary approach has generated considerable interest and momentum among the UN membership. The challenge ahead of us is now to move from the stage of consultations to real negotiations, while mustering real political will for the change that is the very prerequisite for any negotiated agreement.

The new realities of the 21st century also require that the UN Secretariat adapts itself. Much progress has been achieved in this area since the 2005 Summit. But much more still needs to be done. We need a Secretariat that is accountable, transparent, and efficient. We also need a Secretariat that has the adequate resources to perform its activities. **Management reform** is in the best interest of all. I fully support “The Four Nations Initiative” that was established by Chile, South Africa, Sweden, and Thailand, in 2006. The goal of the initiative is to present recommendations on improving governance and management of the UN Secretariat. The initiative is most valuable also for the fact that it is member countries that took the initiative to move ahead in our collective responsibility to improve the capacity of the Organization to implement our decisions.

There is a particularly important area that I want to highlight: The demand for peacekeeping operations and troop deployment has increased exponentially. Today there are nearly 100,000 field personnel deployed in peacekeeping as well as political missions worldwide. This requires an adequate strengthening of the capacity of the United Nations to mount and sustain peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, UN capacity and coherence should also be strengthened in the field of the rule of law.

The United Nations is the only place humanity has created to deal with issues of importance to humankind as a whole. It is the only institution vested with global authority. Yet the power of decision-making at the UN is in turn vested in its member states, which too frequently put their perceived national interest at the forefront when making their decisions. I say perceived, because the nature of a nation's interests is inevitably changing with the rise of global interdependence. We have to start realizing that we can only gain if others gain, and not at the expense of others. We need to comprehend that it is in each and every nation's interest to act in collaboration, and with the spirit of cooperation.

The challenges of tomorrow and of the ever-more interdependent world generate the need for reshaping the policies of the UN. This reshaping should follow some of the core principles that have been importantly developed within the UN system, and that now call for their further development and enactment in practice. Among these **crucial principles of tomorrow** are the intertwined principles of human security, respect for human rights and responsibility to protect.

Human security encompasses the idea that the real security can only be achieved if people can live in security and dignity, free from poverty and despair. Safety is the hallmark of freedom from fear, while well-being is the target of freedom from want. The UN and its General Assembly should be the main nexus in the global action aimed at building world where every individual is guaranteed freedom from fear and

freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to fully develop their human potential. Thanks importantly to Japan's efforts in advocating the concept of human security we have a better understanding of how protection and empowerment of individual human beings, in addition to national security, lie at the very heart of the overall security.

Human rights lie at the very foundations of the comprehensive notion of human security and human well-being. Their overall importance cannot be overstated. To this end, it is of utmost significance that a new institution, Human Rights Council, has been established last year with a clear mandate to work for the promotion and protection of human rights for all. Its mandate includes addressing situations of violations of human rights, in particular gross and systematic violations. Council's status was elevated to subsidiary body of the General Assembly, its membership reduced to 47 members and based on equitable geographic distribution. As the Council's first year of work showed, it clearly faces some challenges. I see an important ongoing role for the General Assembly in overcoming these challenges and in helping to bring the Human Rights Council to live up to its full potential of becoming a truly effective and relevant human rights body of the United Nations.

Another principle that is crucial for ensuring a better and safer tomorrow is the principle of **responsibility to protect** -- a responsibility to protect populations against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The agreement on the responsibility to protect was an important achievement by the World Summit leaders. They agreed for the first time that states have a primary responsibility to protect their own populations and that the international community has a responsibility to act when these governments fail to protect the most vulnerable among us. In taking up its responsibility to protect, the international community agreed to first use the appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means. Should peaceful means be inadequate, the international community is prepared to take collective action through the Security Council and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations. The challenge is now how to put the principle of responsibility to protect effectively into practice: how to provide for early warning, generate effective prevention strategies, and when necessary mobilize effective reaction.

Reflecting on the lessons he has learned as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan said in a farewell speech: "I believe five principles are essential for the future of international relations: collective responsibility, global solidarity, the rule of law, mutual accountability and multilateralism". Together with the above mentioned principles, such as human rights, human security and the responsibility to protect, these are the principles of tomorrow which constitute the foundations of what we could call the **new culture of international relations**. Such culture requires action that is directed to achieving positive results on global scale, and thus to helping others to build the capacity to pursue the principles of human security, human rights, overall protection of population as well as protection of the environment.

Such inclusive culture is not just a matter of altruism it is also a matter of enlightened self-interest. For the underlying understanding of such culture is that in the long run no country and no part of the world can live in peace and prosperity if surrounded by countries in a state of despair. A case in point is climate change to which I have

devoted some thought at the beginning of my lecture today. The transcendental nature of climate change requires in no uncertain terms that we move from geopolitics to eco-politics as a basic criterium of international cooperation and world politics. I would like to mention within this context that Japan's foreign policy in the post Second World War period is an excellent example in this regard.

Japan has been an indispensable part of the efforts to develop a cooperative international system and a new culture of international relations, if you will. I would particularly like to thank the Japanese government for its contribution to the development of and the support for the UN activities. Its commitment to effective multilateralism is highly valued.

I would like to commend Japan not just for its financial contributions to the international institutions but also for its ability to convert its economic success and prosperity into political will to help the ones in need. Japan provides generous financial support for the UN system: The most salient examples are its second largest contribution to the UN regular budget and its similarly remarkable contributions to different Funds, Programmes and Agencies. Japan also contributes importantly to the functioning of the UN by way of deployment of its personnel to peace operations as well as through its leading roles in disarmament and promotion of human security. Furthermore, its chairmanship of the UN Peacebuilding Commission and its record nine times non-permanent membership of the Security Council are also among its important contributions. Japan's role in strengthening the international system and its achievements within the UN have led many to believe that Japan deserves to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

In conclusion, in our increasingly interdependent world, Eleanor Roosevelt's observation of fifty years ago that tomorrow is already walking within today is more true than ever. Our children and our grandchildren, and many more generations to come, will have to live with the consequences of the choices that we make. Let us not fail them. The UN is the central stage of a global response to global challenges, and it is our solemn responsibility to ensure for the future that our civilization is worthy of the inspiring vision that the founders of the United Nations left to us.

Thank you very much.