



**STATEMENT BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON

**AT THE
OPENING OF THE SIXTIETH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
13 SEPTEMBER 2005**

Mr Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to assume the Presidency of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly. I thank you all for the trust you have placed in me.

It is no less an honour for me to succeed President Jean Ping, who has carried a heavy burden of responsibility with grace, warmth and humour over the last year. I particularly want to thank him for his tireless efforts over the last few weeks.

I also want to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, who has responded with calm and determination to the difficulties faced by the organisation, while maintaining a longer-term perspective and a sense of vision, as we saw in his Report, 'In Larger Freedom'. I thank both of you on behalf of all of us assembled here today.

It is almost sixty years since the first session of the General Assembly opened. When I read the words of Dr Zuleta Angel of Colombia, the opening speaker on that occasion, I was struck by their relevance today. He said:

“The whole world now awaits our decisions, and rightly – yet with understandable anxiety – looks to us now to show ourselves capable of mastering our problems.”

Dr. Angel spoke of anxiety in the world outside. Today, sixty years later, we also have reason to feel anxiety and uncertainty about the future.

You have all worked long and hard, most particularly over recent weeks. The process of working on the High-level Meeting Outcome Document has been intense and all-consuming. The reform programme we have been considering has been the most ambitious and wide-ranging since the formation of the UN. Expectations around the world have – again as in 1946 – been exceptionally high. Our discussions have not always been easy. The issues have been difficult and have, for many of you, touched upon important national interests.

As a result of this process, we have received from the 59th session of the General Assembly a comprehensive draft High-level Meeting Outcome Document. I welcome this as a strong basis for the process of reform which we will take forward in the 60th session.

Tomorrow, we begin that process. I expect that, at the High-level Meeting, our leaders will add political momentum and set the waymarks for the road ahead. We will need to listen carefully to them and to the expectations of their people. On Friday, as our leaders are invited to adopt the Outcome Document, we should take stock of what we have heard.

And on Saturday, when we know the mandate our leaders have given us, we should start the urgent task of translating their words into action. I shall revert to this when we open the General Debate. I am confident that this Debate, which will focus on follow-up and implementation of the High-level Meeting, will provide further concrete ideas and proposals for our work ahead.

At the end of that General Debate I intend to reflect further on the situation and present to you an outline of work for the year ahead. This goes both for regular work in the General Assembly, including revitalization, and keeping up the momentum of the reform process.

When we go into this work we should be reminded of two important realities. One, the expectations and dreams of our peoples for this organization. The other, the sombre realities in this world which must also be felt by us in these halls.

The people we serve have expected a lot of us. This is in part a tribute to civil society and to the many Commissions, Panels and Projects, who have done so much to build momentum for progress on development, peace and security and human rights.

It also reflects that we are clearly not making fast enough progress against many of the commitments we have already made – not least, in the case of development, the Millennium Development Goals. But I believe it is also because the peoples of the world can see that a reinvigorated United Nations and a renewed commitment to multilateralism is in all of their interests. And they can see that we have to act now to get it right.

Why do they see international co-operation as so important? Perhaps because it is now so apparent that the world's problems – it's 'realities' – are so complex and inter-linked. As Dag Hammarskjöld once said: 'the nerve signals from a wound in the world are felt at once through the body of mankind'.

The tsunami in Asia had a devastating impact on people in the region, but the effects were also felt – in different ways – around the world. The recent disaster in the Gulf Coast of the United States has further reminded us that no nation is immune from natural disasters and environmental threats. And the terrorist attack on New York four years ago this week, and the number of

abhorrent terrorist attacks all over the world in recent years, remind us that no nation can be immune from threats to its security in today's world.

It is also increasingly clear that we need a renewed multilateralism to tackle the many 'silent tsunamis' of disease and poverty which are killing hundreds of thousands of our fellow human beings. As one anti-poverty campaign reminded us this year, a child dies somewhere in the world as a result of preventable poverty every three seconds. That is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, though the number of active conflicts in the world is in decline, there remain too many people whose lives are ravaged by war, or who live in countries which are struggling to recover from conflicts. To help these people build peace must be our common cause.

The world also needs to deal with the global challenges of disarmament and non-proliferation, and to prevent and resolve conflict. We need to get better at detecting the early signs of human rights abuses and coming together to address them. And we need to reflect on why an organization which was set up to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war' has been unable to prevent ethnic cleansing, mass killings and even genocide. It is time for us all to stop saying 'never again'.

To deal with all these realities, we must reform the way this organization functions. This will be an ongoing endeavour, but also an urgent one. We owe it to those we serve to ensure that our management, oversight and accountability systems are of the highest possible calibre.

I believe all these issues give us, the United Nations General Assembly, real reason and impetus to rally together. Tackling global poverty, addressing climate change, fighting terrorism and protecting human rights – these are not issues that only one group or one region has an interest in resolving. They are issues that each and every one of us has a duty to resolve together, in the spirit of the best traditions of the United Nations – transparency, civility and mutual respect. At the same time we need to strive for efficiency and a sense of purpose.

So, we have all worked exceptionally hard. The world's expectations are high. We go into the High-level Meeting and await our leaders' direction and vision. Recognizing the responsibility history has placed on us to shape the future for all our peoples, we must all move forward with renewed energy and determination.

Let us not underestimate what we can do. The world's poorest, the least secure and the most oppressed demand change. Let us show them what we can do.
