



STATEMENT BY

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

H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON

AT THE

**UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK
GALA DINNER: 'A SPOTLIGHT ON GLOBAL
HEALTH'**

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

21 OCTOBER 2005

Thank you very much. It's wonderful to be here. I'm glad you didn't read my full CV because there is there is one part there that deals with my activities in mediation. I was a mediator in the Iran-Iraq war and Nagorno Karabakh and Sudan and so forth but on one occasion about three months ago I was introduced by a lady who had read my CV a bit too fast so she said this Ambassador is an interesting person because he's an expert in meditation. So I got off to the wrong start there, but you've put me on the right track, thank you very much.

First of all I want to tell you how happy I am to be with you here. UNA New York is one of the fastest growing organizations of the UN body in the United States. I think you are the fastest. I think that's a wonderful sign. I hope it sets a trend in the United States. I also think the programme you have to help to educate orphans and vulnerable children with AIDS all over the world is an extremely important programme.

By showing your commitment to the United Nations you're proving that Shakespeare was right in *Romeo and Juliet* where Friar Lorenzo tells Romeo when he's crazily in love and seeing he has to leave his wonderful Juliet behind: 'remember there is a world outside Verona'. We all have to remember there is a world outside Verona, whether we are Europeans wondering whether to admit Turkey to the European Union or the United States facing the world. I thank you for the reminder we get from your very active organization and the message you give that we have to do things together in this world, and that the United Nations is the symbol of doing things together.

Also I think we have great prizewinners today. The Links Incorporated for their efforts on water, HIV/AIDS, refugees, education, safe motherhood. Secondly the International Federation of Health Plans, for setting such a good example of a positive private sector role, and of course Liya Kebede for bringing the overlooked issues of child and maternal health to the world's attention so effectively.

I also praise work of the Loomba Trust, represented here tonight by the driving force behind it Cherie Booth, in caring for children, and for highlighting the plight of – not least – widows. There has been the establishment of June 23 as International Widows Day. It's a tragic reminder but wonderful to put the plight of those widows in the centre. Thank you Cherie for doing that.

Today's theme is Spotlight on Global Health. It is a telling phrase – so many of our health challenges and solutions are global in nature.

More and more threats are global in nature, yet the multilateral approach, and the United Nations as an institution, are under scrutiny as never before. Looking at global health gives us good examples of what's been achieved to date through multilateral channels, and why we need them so much now.

As the President of the General Assembly I feel that we now face a test of multilateralism. We have to prove that there are good multilateral solutions. Otherwise we will go in other directions which will turn

events in this world in a very negative direction. So I welcome anything you can do to strengthen that commitment we have to doing things together in these days, and months, and years to come. I don't give it many years. I think we are at a crucial time in history. It's a tremendous paradox. We have this age of globalization knowing that these issues have to be solved on the international level – whether it's drugs or the environment or refugees – but at the same time there is this tendency of looking inward. We have to move out, be open to the outside world and choose the multilateral road.

Now looking back, it's 25 years since WHO led the campaign which successfully eradicated smallpox. Do you know that it has freed up \$1 billion a year that would have been spent on vaccinations for tackling other health challenges?

WHO has also virtually eliminated river blindness in West Africa. What is the practical effect of that? 11 million children who would have gone blind can see. This is the daily work of the United Nations.

And we're tantalizingly close to the elimination of polio. This has been a great initiative spearheaded by WHO but also by UNICEF, Rotary International and the US Centres for Disease Control. Without the UN, how could this have been done? As a result, a disease which once crippled children in 125 countries is now found in only 6 countries. Five million children are walking today who would otherwise have been crippled. These are facts.

Looking to the future, there's the threat of Avian flu. It's only through a co-ordinated response led by WHO and FAO in Rome that the world will cope with any pandemic that hits us – just as quick, effective WHO action stopped SARS from spreading further than it did.

And of course there's HIV/AIDS. The international response was woefully slow. I want to say it's one of the scars on the conscience of our generation. We never needed to find ourselves in a position where over 2 million people a year are dying from the virus. And where the development gains in some sub-Saharan African countries are being wiped out.

A big part of the response to AIDS has to come from governments and peoples in the countries affected. There's no substitute for national leadership. But it needs international backing. Again, the multilateral system has been crucial. The WTO provided the forum for the Doha declaration on access to medicines. UNAIDS has raised the profile of AIDS. The Global Fund – strongly supported by the United States – has raised much higher levels of funding – and is delivering on the ground.

And I'm proud to report that the World Summit committed to (and I quote) 'developing and implementing a package for HIV prevention, treatment and care with the aim of coming as close as possible to the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010 for all those who need it'. The follow-up meeting next year will provide a forum for ensuring this commitment is turned into action.

There are other global diseases we need to tackle. I won't mention them all. But as I told the General Assembly last week, it's a scandal that a child still dies of malaria every thirty seconds in Africa, despite the fact that we know how to prevent and treat it, and that it can be done cheaply. The same could be said for TB.

And of course it's also a scandal and a tragedy that so many children die under the age of five, and so many mothers die in childbirth. In Sweden, as my wife knows – and I'm glad I could bring my wife here tonight, she's the Deputy Minister of Science and Education so she'll confirm that I'm now giving the right figures – in Sweden one child in three hundred will die before the age of five. In Sierra Leone, it's one in three. This is unacceptable. And I'm sure Liya Kebede will speak more about the daunting challenges facing women and children in developing countries later.

But in closing I would like to highlight a constraint that underlies all these problems: the lack of trained health workers. In many countries, not enough are being trained, not least in Africa. Those with training are either leaving the profession due to poor pay and conditions, or migrating to countries that pay them better. Worse still, many are dying from the very diseases they are trying to combat. As a result, sub-Saharan Africa has one tenth the number of nurses and doctors per person that Europe has. It needs at least one million extra health workers to help it meet the MDGs.

That isn't just Africa's problem. It's everyone's. Imagine what would

have happened if SARS had spread to those parts of Africa where health systems were already at breaking point. Now think about what could happen with Avian flu. Solving the health worker shortage is the next big global health challenge, and I call on the international community to address it head on.

The encouraging thing is that this and all the other health challenges can be met. It's not an impossible task. Ask any one of those millions of children I mentioned who can see and walk, thanks to effective international action.

But the UN and its Member States need to hear their citizens tell them this has to be done. 'We the peoples': those are the first three words of the UN Charter. You need to be heard. People need to be heard. We need to bring the realities into these halls. The realities of the real problems of poverty and diseases but also the realities of the aspirations, expectations and dreams that you have about the United Nations. And we need to listen to that, listen to your voices and then create the momentum we need to translate all the good intentions that we declared when the High Level Meeting took place with all the leaders of the world a month ago. So therefore this work you are doing is so important. Just look at the momentum created by the Make Poverty History campaign. It's no coincidence that 2005 has seen a doubling of aid for Africa and a historic step forward on debt. I want to commend Prime Minister Blair as President of the G8 for how strongly he and his government pushed those issues.

This is where you come in. The United Nations Association New York. Everything you do to make the international agenda a relevant one and a strong one in this country. Because the United Nations can never be a strong Organization without the United States and I would claim the United States will not be as successful as it wants to be, as the American people want it to be, if the United Nations does not become an effective and strong Organization. So there is a new special relationship that we need to forge. I hope that we together can see that this Organization reformed and strengthened is not only in the interests of those of us who negotiate now the actions arising from the Summit Document accepted by the Member States but also that this Organization is there to serve the peoples of the world and that we together can make a difference, and you by your work are making a difference today and if I may say so you will I'm sure tomorrow make an even greater difference. Thank you very much.