



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
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**THE GABRIEL SILVER MEMORIAL LECTURE**

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM: THE UNITED NATIONS  
IN A CHANGING WORLD**

**Dean Anderson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is a great honour to be invited to speak this evening, on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.**

**As a Swede, I am particularly honoured to be the inaugural speaker in the new Dag Hammarskjöld Centre. 2005 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hammarskjöld's birth. The former Secretary-General is, in my view, a role model of diplomacy and an inspiration to those who believe in multilateralism. He had a clear vision of the United Nations' role in the world, but also a determination to be practical and concrete and to play a role helping people on the ground. He was doing just this - trying to bring peace to the people of the Congo - when he met his untimely death in September 1961.**

**It is with the people of the world, and with two types of realities, that I want to begin my remarks - realities which must guide the way we work, but often seem far away from our procedures and negotiating rooms.**

**The first reality is the crushing poverty and insecurity which marks the lives of so many of our fellow human beings, and takes away what the UN Charter calls the ‘dignity and worth of the human person’.**

**The second reality is that of our peoples’ aspirations, expectations and dreams for the kind of United Nations they want to see.**

**I saw some of the hellish reality of poverty and conflict when I went to Somalia in 1992 as Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs. I saw United Nations and NGO staff handing out bottles of water to people in desperate need. A woman was handed a bottle and I was struck by the look in her eyes – a look which told me how something as simple as a bottle of water meant the difference between health and disease. It was the difference between doing a productive day’s work, and walking miles for a bucket of polluted water, with the risk of being raped along the way.**

**This human reality from Somalia tells us something profound. The poorest and most vulnerable in the world need an international system which makes a difference in their daily lives. They needed it in Somalia in 1992, and they need it in many other places today where conflicts have deprived people of security, dignity and livelihoods. The World Summit in September concluded that governments and the international community have a responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This is an important advance for the cause of human security.**

**But we also need the multilateral system in countries like Burundi and Liberia where, after years of civil war, there have been democratic elections and there is now the best chance for peace in a generation. This is the second reality – the reality of dreams, aspirations and expectations. The people of Burundi and Liberia expect that the international community will help them rebuild their shattered countries. In the recent past, around half the countries which emerged from conflict relapsed into fighting within five years. This trend must be reversed.**

**So the poorest and most vulnerable people need an effective multilateral system. But I firmly believe that all nations, including the richest and most powerful, also need effective multilateralism.**

**Let us consider some of the major threats in the beginning of the twenty-first century: global disease outbreaks, chronic poverty, natural disasters, climate change, terrorism, organized crime and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. How would the world deal with these threats if there were no multilateral system – no regional organizations, no World Bank, no United Nations?**

**Dealing with Avian flu effectively will require a co-ordinated international prevention effort by the World Health Organization. It will need all nations to share information in real time. And international responses must be triggered the moment such data come in. How could this be done by nation states acting alone?**

**Over the last year natural disasters have taken an enormous toll, from the tsunami to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to the flooding and mudslides in Central America. And now we have the devastating earthquake in South Asia in which more than 50,000 people have been confirmed dead, one million people are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, and three million are without shelter – and the winter is fast approaching.**

**International responses to natural disasters must complement the work of individual governments and peoples. We need a functioning multilateral system with the authority to ensure that the spontaneous outpouring of assistance each time a disaster strikes is effectively co-ordinated and delivered. Only a multilateral system could give us a Global Emergency Fund with funds ready to be used the moment a disaster strikes. The United Nations is close to having such a fund in operation. Only a functioning multilateral system can prevent or mitigate disasters, whether by beginning to tackle the underlying climatic causes, or putting early warning systems in place. As a result of the World Summit in September, the United Nations is now taking action on both prevention and co-ordinated responses.**

**Meanwhile, there are ‘silent tsunamis’ of disease, hunger and poverty, largely unnoticed across the world. Every month HIV/AIDS kills the same number of people as those who died in the tsunami last year. Every**

**thirty seconds, a child in Africa dies of malaria, even though the disease is cheap and easy to treat. In Sierra Leone, every third child will die before the age of five.**

**We cannot afford to ignore these statistics. We cannot afford a world in which the few get ever richer while the many are ever more aware of these riches but are unable to even aspire to them. Such a world is in nobody's interest. The lines separating the rich and poor can only hold for so long in this age of instant communication and growing global awareness.**

**So, we need a multilateral response to world poverty. The price of failure would be an ever more fractured and unsafe world. The prize of success? If we can achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, we will lift 1.5 billion people out of extreme poverty, save 300 million people from hunger, prevent 30 million children a year from dying before the age of five, stop two million mothers from dying in childbirth, give 350 million more people access to safe water, and give hundreds of millions of women the chance to have an education. We know this can be done. We need to make sure we mobilize and work together to reach these goals.**

**The same case can be made for other global challenges of our time. Multilateralism is needed to prevent and bring to justice the perpetrators of international terrorism, just as it is needed to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to bring about disarmament – an area where the World Summit achieved far less than expected.**

**I believe we are now at an important juncture in history. In a world of much insecurity and mistrust, do we redouble our efforts to create a multilateral system that can deal with today's challenges? Or do we retreat behind our borders, trying to build up our defences against the modern-day threats, but finding that we cannot build them high enough?**

**Perhaps it is harder to place our faith in multilateralism when many of the world's institutions are under attack or in a state of self-doubt. It is not only the United Nations that is facing critical scrutiny. The fate of, for example, the European Union constitution is an indicator of the difficulty international institutions are facing in defining their role and dealing with popular sentiments.**

**The United Nations has had particular problems of late. We are aware of the disgraceful conduct of a small minority of United Nations peacekeepers which has recently come to light. And this year we have heard a serious critique of the United Nations in the form of the Volcker Report on the Oil for Food programme. Both these developments point**

to the need for changes in the way the United Nations is run. The 2005 World Summit agreed on a substantial list of management issues needing attention. There is an important process underway in the General Assembly and the Secretariat to work out how such changes should be made.

This work is important, and must be carried out seriously and thoroughly. But in the midst of it we should not forget that across the world, the United Nations and its agencies and programmes are making a real difference on the ground. They have helped 8.4 million Iraqis vote in the referendum on the new constitution. They provided food aid to two million people affected by the tsunami. They are helping vaccinate millions of children. They are inspecting nuclear and associated facilities in over 140 countries. They are currently running peacekeeping operations in 16 countries. And behind the scenes mediation efforts are increasingly leading to pacific settlement of disputes. One recent report noted that the United Nations has led a 'remarkable explosion' in conflict prevention since the 1980s.

These facts alone do not prove the case for the United Nations. But it is hard to think of another body that would have the legitimacy to tackle these global challenges. We should recognize that much of what is wrong with the United Nations is a reflection of what is wrong in the world. It is sometimes easy to turn to the United Nations to resolve problems knowing that its Member States may not allow it to do so, and then criticize the institution for failing.

**We must escape from this Catch-22. And I believe that the United Nations General Assembly during this the Sixtieth Session has a historic opportunity to do so.**

- **We need to keep up the momentum in the fight against poverty, and make sure the commitments made this year are implemented. Here the Economic and Social Council has an important role to play.**
- **On peacebuilding, the 2005 World Summit tasked us to have a functioning Peacebuilding Commission in place before the end of the year. This should finally ensure that places like Burundi and Liberia get the help they need to make their escape from conflict lasting and their emergence from poverty possible .**
- **On human rights, we are to establish a Council to replace the Commission on Human Rights. Though the United Nations record to date on dealing with human rights abuses has been mixed, who could have the authority to act as the global guardian of human rights, if not the United Nations? I have asked the General Assembly to strive to finalise the negotiations on a new and more effective Human Rights Council before the end of the year, so it can begin work in 2006.**
- **On terrorism, we have a mandate to conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. We should do so before the**



end of this year. And we must also give attention to the development of a counter-terrorism strategy.

- And as I have already mentioned, there is an important agenda of management reforms to be taken forward.

Many observers argue that the 2005 World Summit will make little difference in the outside world. Others still are frustrated that issues important to them such as disarmament and non-proliferation or Security Council reform are missing or insufficiently clear in the Summit document.

But the critics should wait and see whether the General Assembly can muster a spirit of urgency and common purpose during this the 60<sup>th</sup> session; whether we can push ahead on each reform issue on its own merits. This will ultimately determine whether the World Summit goes down in history as a missed opportunity for the United Nations, or as the start of the most substantial reform programme in the history of the Organisation.

For members of the General Assembly, this is a great responsibility but also a great opportunity. The 191 Permanent Representatives and their staff here in New York are a knowledgeable and determined group of professionals. They recognize the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable, and they understand that it is in their enlightened self-interest to do something for them. They see the need for reform and adapting the United Nations to meet today's and tomorrow's threats. They are supported by capitals, which are growingly aware of the need for global solutions. And they know that the

**Secretary-General and the United Nations agencies, programmes and staff will want to, and can, help make this possible.**

**But they need the support of world public opinion. They need the support of students, academics, faith groups, business and trade unions, NGOs and civil society. There can be no better illustration of the power of civil society than the global ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign. Look at what it helped to deliver: a doubling of aid for Africa, and a historic step forward on debt for the world’s poorest countries. This momentum must be maintained to ensure that we get a substantial development outcome in the WTO trade talks in Hong Kong in December.**

**The ultimate test of our work must be in the field. It is when we see the lives of ordinary people improving that we will know that we are doing the right thing – when we know that women in Somalia and many other countries do not have to risk their health each day for want of that most basic commodity: clean water.**

**I would like to finish on a positive note. One of the worst traps we can fall into is that of hopelessness and despair. The challenges we face can be overcome. Look at the fight against poverty. One hundred years ago my own country, Sweden, was desperately poor. Much more recently, great strides have been made by many nations.**

Nearly half of Africa's governments have agreed to have their governance reviewed by their peers. Across the continent there are governments taking action to stamp out corruption at all levels. This African renaissance is beginning to bear fruit. Average GDP growth in 2004 was the highest in 8 years. Mozambique, a country which was on its knees when I was there in the early 1990s has cut poverty by a third in the past 15 years and has doubled the number of children in schools. Rwanda has emerged from the dark shadow of genocide to face the future with confidence. It is empowering its women: the proportion of women in the Rwandan Parliament is the highest in the world.

And the African Union itself is now leading in trying to resolve the conflicts that have scarred Africa, not least the devastating ongoing conflict in Darfur. All this has been done with African leadership, backed up with international support.

So, in conclusion, today's challenges can be overcome. But we have to face them together. And we need a mechanism for doing so. The world needs the United Nations. The United States needs the United Nations, just as the United Nations needs the United States. We have a once in a generation opportunity. If we cannot help the United Nations to rise to the challenge, nations will look for other ways of addressing threats, with less legitimacy and less support.

**Dag Hammarskjöld said in 1960: ‘we have too much in common, too great a sharing of interests and too much that we might lose together, for ourselves and succeeding generations, ever to weaken in our efforts to turn simple human values into the firm foundation on which we may live together in peace’.**

**So this session of the United Nations General Assembly is truly a test of multilateralism. If we use the 2005 World Summit results to take steps to improve the lives and destinies of the peoples and nations of the world, we could help to pave the way for a new age of multilateralism – so sorely needed.**

**This task goes beyond the halls of the United Nations General Assembly. It must be embraced by governments, regional organizations, civil society and individuals all around the world. The United Nations Charter opens with the words ‘We the Peoples’. We the peoples – together can – and must – make a difference.**