



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 10 January 2006

Today, it is exactly sixty years since the first session of the United Nations General Assembly opened in London.

There have been many changes in the Assembly over the last 60 years. In 1946, there were 51 Member States; now there are 191. In 1946, the agenda centred around the challenges facing the world in the aftermath of World War II. In the 1950s and 1960s decolonization was a major task.

Throughout the last sixty years, the Assembly has taken landmark decisions on matters in which all humanity has an interest – from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. And the United Nations has overseen an enormous amount of practical activity to promote development, democracy and human rights, protect the environment, and maintain peace and security.

Now, the Assembly has responsibilities encompassing both old and new threats and challenges in the field of international security, development and poverty reduction, communicable diseases, human rights, humanitarian assistance, non-proliferation and disarmament and counter-terrorism.

But some defining characteristics have not changed. The General Assembly remains the world's single universal intergovernmental body. And in September 2005, the largest ever gathering of world leaders reaffirmed 'the central role of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations'.

The words of Dr Zuleta Angel of Colombia, the opening speaker on 10 January 1946, are strikingly relevant 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.”

In a world of much uncertainty and mistrust, we need a strong United Nations and an effective General Assembly more than ever. We, the Members of the Assembly, must show that we can respond decisively to the major challenges of the twenty-first century. We must meet the test of international co-operation and multilateralism which the world now faces.

Jan Eliasson
President of the 60th Session of the General Assembly