



A Speech by

**His Excellency Mr John Dauth LVO
Australian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United
Nations**

to the

59th Session of the UN General Assembly

New York, 30 September 2004
(check against delivery)

Mr President

Let me begin by congratulating you on your election as President of the 59th Session of the General Assembly.

I am also delighted to welcome Iraq back to the General Assembly.

Introduction

Mr President

We, the nations of the world, gathered together at UNGA 59, face challenges to international security and prosperity that are very different to those which existed at the birth of the UN.

But the aims of the UN as set out in the Charter remain as relevant and vital today as they did then:

- to save successive generations from the scourge of war;
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights;
- to establish conditions for justice and respect for international law;
- and to promote social progress and better living standards in freedom.

Today, the menace of terrorism and the dangers of proliferation of WMD cast their shadow across the globe...

...threatening not only our security, but the development gains and future prosperity of all nations.

And it is this new international environment – this new reality – to which we must all adjust.

The UN is no exception.

The UN is a vital institution that does great humanitarian work ...

... but it must strengthen its capacity to deal effectively with the problems we now face ...

... or risk sliding into irrelevance.

The Secretary-General recognised this last year when he said ‘we have come to a fork in the road...a moment no less decisive than 1945 itself when the UN was founded’.

And again this year when he stated that, if the leaders of the world cannot agree on the way forward, history will take the decisions ...

The issue he raises for us all is whether we, the UN membership, can rise to the challenge and take the steps necessary for the organisation to fulfil its aims in today’s world.

Australia strongly supported the establishment by the Secretary-General of a High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change last year ...

... and stands ready to contribute to ambitious outcomes.

I will return to the panel later in this address.

Terrorism

Mr President

There would be few nations in the room untouched by terrorism.

As the cowardly attacks in Beslan and at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta illustrate – terrorism will not simply fade away.

In response we, the international community, cannot allow security threats to fester.

What is required is new thinking, practical action, and cooperation between governments.

Obviously the UN has a primary role to play.

But Governments and regional organisations must also ensure their resources and infrastructure can respond to the current environment.

This is a responsibility Australia has taken seriously.

On terrorism, we have fully supported the work of the UN

- ensuring Jema'ah Islamiyah was listed as a terrorist organisation under the UNSCR 1267 sanctions regime and promoting compliance with the UN's terrorist asset freezing regime.

We have committed energy and resources to building counter-terrorism cooperation in our region, both bilaterally and through organisations such as APEC and the ARF.

We are also committed to building understanding as part of a comprehensive approach.

This is evident in the messages we convey to our regional partners and to Australians, namely:

- that our efforts to stop a minority of extremist-Muslim terrorists is not a war on Islam;
- that Muslims are as much the victims of terrorist attacks and must defend themselves;
- and that we must all work to defeat terrorism together.

Our cooperation with regional partners has delivered results.

But as the recent bombing in Jakarta illustrates, terrorism in our region is not yet defeated.

While Australia's embassy in Jakarta may have been the target of the latest attack, it was as much an assault on Indonesia as on Australia ...

... and we are particularly saddened by the loss of innocent Indonesian lives.

Indonesia and Australia are determined to catch the perpetrators and see justice done ...

... for the bonds between us cannot be split by terrorists, but only strengthened.

Security in the Pacific

Australia's commitment to a stable and secure region is also reflected in our efforts in the Pacific.

Since September 11, we have come to appreciate more acutely the dangers weak and failing states can pose to security.

Of course, not all such states are home to terrorists.

But where instability and vulnerabilities exist, so too do opportunities for crime and the potential for human suffering.

When Australia's Foreign Minister, the Honourable Alexander Downer MP, addressed this forum last year, he noted Australia was developing regional approaches to confront the dangers of state failure ...

... and that with our Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) partners – we were restoring hope to the people of Solomon Islands.

In just one year, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has made excellent progress in restoring stability and law and consolidating government finances...

...and is now moving into long-term governance reform.

Australia is also working with other states in our region, notably Papua New Guinea and Nauru, to address economic management and governance issues ...

... and regional cooperation is being strengthened through the Pacific Plan, an initiative of the recent Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting in Apia, which seeks to enhance collaboration in areas of governance.

We would encourage the High-Level Panel to outline ambitious proposals for effective collective action to address failed and failing states – including more explicit provision for action by regional and other plurilateral arrangements, as set out in Chapter VIII of the Charter.

Iraq

Mr President

Iraq is at a critical moment in its political evolution.

A small minority is bent on destruction and murder and wants to deny the Iraqi people their opportunity to express their political will in elections.

This minority also attacks those who work to rebuild Iraq's economy and improve Iraqi lives.

Increasingly, Iraqis themselves will be responsible for doing that work ...

... but success will depend on the resolute support of the international community.

We cannot allow terrorists to disrupt the democratic process in Iraq.

Prime Minister Allawi has emphasised his Government's determination to hold elections in January 2005 ...

... and the Special Representative in Iraq has told the Security Council that maintaining the election schedule is his greatest priority.

While the difficult security conditions in Iraq cannot be denied, it is imperative that the UN fulfil its role under UNSCR 1546 and work with Iraqis to complete arrangements for the elections on time.

The size of the UN's presence in Iraq must be commensurate with the importance and urgency of its task.

For its part, Australia remains committed to assisting Iraq transform itself.

To this end, we have committed more than \$A125 million, much of it directed through the UN.

Darfur

Mr President

The situation in Darfur is a humanitarian disaster.

Australia is committed to supporting urgent international efforts to end this horrific crisis

- we have already committed \$A20 million in emergency assistance for the people of Darfur.

Australia welcomes the adoption of UNSCR 1564, and applauds the African Union for agreeing to lead a mission to Darfur

- we stand ready to offer assistance to this mission.

The situation in Darfur underlines the need for the international community to develop a better framework for responding to humanitarian crises

- we hope the High-Level Panel will come up with clear and workable recommendations on humanitarian intervention.

Arms Control

Mr President

The proliferation of WMD is another urgent concern.

Unless we act firmly and with unity, terrorist groups could one day acquire WMD with disastrous consequences.

As a threat to international security the issue of WMD proliferation falls squarely within the Security Council's mandate.

We welcome adoption of UNSCR 1540 as a demonstration of the Council's willingness to engage on WMD proliferation, including the risk of WMD terrorism.

We hope that with adoption of this resolution the Council will take a firmer and more active stance on WMD issues.

As part of our commitment to combating the risk of nuclear terrorism, Australia will host an Asia-Pacific Ministerial conference in November on nuclear safeguards and security.

And, in this year's First Committee, we – along with Turkey and Argentina – will introduce a resolution on "Prevention of the Illicit

Transfer and Unauthorised Access to and Use of Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS)”.

We hope for consensus adoption of this resolution, which encourages states to take concrete steps to prevent MANPADS falling into the hands of non-state end-users.

High-Level Panel

Mr President

During this address I have referred several times to the High-Level Panel.

Australia welcomes the direction of panel discussions – as far as we understand them – with respect to both doctrinal and institutional reform.

Australia has contributed actively to the panel’s work ...

...and we encourage the panel, in its remaining deliberations, to work towards ambitious recommendations on all its work programme – including Security Council reform, addressing threats from WMD and terrorism, humanitarian intervention and effective collective action.

We note here, on structural reform, that Australia has advocated expanding the permanent membership of the Security Council to make it more compatible with geographical realities ...

... through the addition of Japan, India, Brazil, an African country and possibly Indonesia.

Whatever the final shape of the panel’s report, one thing is clear – high-level political commitment will be crucial to bringing bold reform recommendations to fruition.

And we would encourage all member states to give the Secretary-General their full support in consideration of the panel’s recommendations.

One opportunity to do this will be the 2005 UN Heads of Government Summit.

The Summit provides an excellent forum not only to review implementation of the Millennium Development Goals ...

... but also to endorse a reformed UN, better equipped to deal with the challenges it faces.

Conclusion

Mr President

Australia has long advocated the need for UN reform.

Back in 2000 Mr Downer warned that

- ‘in the absence of change and adaptation, the organisation will wither as the nations of the world bypass it in favour of ... mechanisms that are more relevant to their needs.’

Of course, this warning was ...

... before September 11 ...

... before coalition action in Afghanistan and Iraq ...

... and before the terrorist bombings in Bali, Jakarta, Madrid, Istanbul and many other locations.

If the need for reform was pressing then, it is critical now.

The High-Level Panel provides the best prospect for repositioning the UN system to meet contemporary challenges.

This is an opportunity we cannot waste if the UN – our organisation – is to retain a substantial role in maintaining international peace and security in the 21st century.

Thank you.