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Statement
by
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of the Republic of Poland
at the Fifty-Ninth Session
of the General Assembly of the United Nations

New York, September 24th, 2004

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset let me offer you, Mr. President, my sincere congratulations on your election to the prestigious office of the President of the fifty-ninth session of the UN General Assembly. The delegation of Poland extends to you, Sir, its firm support in your demanding mandate.

Let me likewise express to the former President, Mr. Julian Hunte, our appreciation of his remarkable leadership, which he brought to the fifty-eighth session.

I should also like to convey to Mr. Kofi Annan, the distinguished Secretary-General my sincere greetings and words of appreciation for his continues efforts to make the organization an indispensable tool of the international cooperation.

The agenda of this session —that you preside your Excellency- is not only full of importance and burning issues but also brings great hopes and expectations. In his statement H.E. Bernard Bot, the distinguished Foreign Minister of the Netherlands presented the EU position on the most important problems. This statement fully reflects our thinking and concerns. One issue, however, which deserves our special attention today is the reform of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

The present session of the General Assembly must be remembered as a session of reform. It should lay foundations for a profound and consensus-based reflection on the relevance and effectiveness of the United Nations. This reflection should result in bold and imaginative decisions providing for a substantial overhaul of the Organization. That is how we see in Poland the preparations for the 2005 Major Event, which would undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration as well as mark the 60th anniversary of the United Nations. The United Nations is actually at the fork of the road, as the Secretary-General Kofi Annan remarked last year. At this session, it is time to act. We have to show our ability to take the right course.

Mr. President,

Every year, during the annual general debates at the General Assembly, we take the floor to express our views, sometimes very critical, on the work of the Organization. Every year we share new hopes that a breakthrough is coming. However, there is little evidence that these debates have had a significant impact on the very future of the United Nations. Indeed, over the past years, the United Nations has seen many celebratory and majestic gatherings. However, unless we are able to build a political consensus and work out efficient, forward-looking and workable decisions, we should cut down on high-level ceremonies. Empty summits are too misleading.

Mr. President,

Reforming the United Nations is undoubtedly an old postulate. However, it was always a difficult one, mainly because we – the individual members – were too successful in defending our own particular interests and positions at the expense of the Organization as such. Over the years of its existence, the United Nations has been always changing, always reforming, but has never been reformed. This time, we must break the vicious circle of inaction.

The Republic of Poland has voiced, on numerous occasions, its deepest conviction that we have to do a comprehensive, strategic review of the role of the United Nations, in its both normative and institutional aspects. It was with this in mind that, on behalf of the Republic of Poland, I had the privilege to put forward two years ago the idea of a New Political Act for the United Nations. We are pleased to see that, two years later, this belief and determination is widely shared among the United Nations members, and especially by the Secretary-General and his Secretariat.

Having in mind this unique momentum for the reform, we look forward to the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change appointed by the Secretary-General. It should provide a critical mass for the reformatory efforts and form a solid basis upon which the further actions could be built.

In this context, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Panel who came to Warsaw in May this year to consult with representatives from our part of Europe on the most important conceptual aspects of the reform. The Warsaw Regional Conference has been a rewarding experience. not only because it brought together numerous outstanding

experts, but also because of the engagement and creativity that has been brought to the subject. We hope that the Report of the Warsaw Conference, which we made available to all delegations at this Assembly, will contribute constructively to the solution of extremely difficult tasks put before the Panel.

We should, however, be realistic. Let us not expect that the Panel can provide a philosopher's stone turning the United Nations into a shining example of a perfect international organization. There are no magic solutions in a world with so many diverging interests and complex problems. We have to keep turning steadily the hopeful beginning into a dynamic reality. As Richard von Weizsaecker, former President of the Federal Republic of Germany, noted ironically in Warsaw: "Giants, in the long run, are not unable to become wise."

Mr. President,

We have never had any problem with ideas, excellent proposals, and promising initiatives. The biggest obstacle to the reform has been rather the lack of political consensus. The reform cannot be effective if it reflects the sporadic initiatives of small groups of specialists or politicians. It cannot be solved solely in technical terms. It must rely on a broad consensus and reflect a shared community of values and a sense of identity and purpose. Let us focus our energy on building this necessary political consensus with our strong commitment to act together through the United Nations.

Although the reform of United Nations has to go beyond the institutional aspects, we also have to recognize the fact that institutions are important, at times even decisive, and they spur most heated political emotions. Therefore, any reform package without ideas on the reform of the UN bodies, especially of the Security Council, would be considered by the majority of Member States as insufficient, unsatisfactory and missing its goals.

Since the role of the Security Council is central to the effectiveness of the United Nations, Poland shares a common opinion that it is hard to imagine strengthening the role of the Security Council without increasing its legitimacy. Today's discussions on the Security Council's reform are mainly focused on expanding its membership. However, the key to a more effective and legitimate Security Council does not lie in the number of its members.

A Council of 24 states will probably not have a more powerful voice than that of 15. Yet, at the same time, we agree that at the present stage of the discussions, the United Nations Security Council has to expand. We reached on that a point of no-return. Poland can accept any compromise proposal pertaining to the increase in both categories of its members.

One of the deficiencies of the United Nations transpiring from the conceptual discussion is that there is too much gap between the mandating and the implementing functions. Therefore, we believe that it is the responsibility of the members of the Security Council to ensure the lead in providing the political and material support to the implementation of the Security Council mandates. This should not only be in the competencies of the Secretary General or the Secretariat. The Republic of Poland believes that the Security Council reform should be built on the assumption that being its member not only grants additional privileges but also increases responsibilities.

Mr. President,

The reform should preserve an inherent balance between various organs of the United Nations. While we support the tendency to expect more from the Security Council, this should be accompanied by a more effective role of the General Assembly. Poland is convinced that the latter body can become valuable in developing a culture of prevention. We also believe that the Security Council should, as a normal practice, seek the opinions of the General Assembly on issues of international peace and security. They should be seen as mutually supporting and reinforcing organs. Their interaction should become an important aspect of the revitalization of the General Assembly. Poland, Mr. President, is ready to cooperate with you in this respect.

However, in order to use the potential of the General Assembly effectively and optimize its performance, we must change profoundly the way we speak to each other at this forum. This must be a forum of dialog. Occasionally, one can hear jokes that the General Assembly is a place where everybody speaks but nobody listens to. We have to change it. We must start talking to each other more directly, more candidly.

Mr. President,

The need to raise performance of the United Nations bodies and institutions in the social-economic, development and environment as well as other related areas is no less

pressing. There is a real danger that the Millennium Goals will not be fulfilled, which would deliver a serious blow to the credibility of the United Nations. Recognizing the fact that the clear distinction between socio-economic and political aspects is increasingly blurred, we need a unified approach. However, the existing efforts are often too fragmented, uncoordinated, even contradictory and self-paralyzing. We are good here at raising the awareness, drawing the attention, formulating goals and promises, but we still lack on developing workable mechanisms for implementing them. These mechanisms will not be effective if we do not find the way to transform them into real actions of governments. In this context, the role of the ECOSOC and its reform should be strictly linked with other UN bodies, including the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

In order to be comprehensive, the reform cannot stop at its institutional dimension. We need to reflect again on the nature of current security challenges. The predictable threats caused in the past by the wars between countries have been replaced by indefinite and unpredictable threats caused by international terrorism, proliferation of WMD, and an increasing number of states in distress, whose governments are unable to exercise effective power over their territory and population. Thus, the main function of the State, which is to offer security and protection to its citizens, is undermined. As a consequence, we are facing an unprecedented spread of acts of terrorism and violence.

In this context, on behalf of the People of the Republic of Poland and myself, I would like to express the deepest condolences to the relatives and friends of all victims of the recent terrorist attack in Beslan. We condemn this barbaric act and offer our solidarity with the victims.

Mr. President,

To cope properly and successfully with the new nature of threats and challenges, it is necessary to use this opportunity to examine the functional and conceptual basis of the organization. Therefore, Poland advocates that the important part of the adaptation of the UN system to the new realities should be a re-examination of the conceptual foundations of the United Nations.

At present, we have a deep crisis of confidence in the functional ability of the international order, of which the UN is a central part. When we refer to functions and mandate of the UN, we do not question the relevance of the existing bodies of the international law

including the basic principles. Paradoxically, we do already have at hand all instruments, tools, and fundamental rules we need to manage properly new security threats. These new threats cast a new light on the concepts that we use to regulate the international order. Principles such as the non-use of force, sovereignty, legitimacy, accountability for both the states and their leaders, subsidiarity, complementarity, solidarity and responsibility are not new. What we need is their new adjustment to the current reality, new political guidelines on how we, and in particular, how Security Council's members should interpret them in action.

Among them is the principle of solidarity. For us, solidarity is more than just assisting the poor and underdeveloped. Solidarity is an operational principle, which should generate cooperative attitudes for countries in need, including those plagued by terrorism, natural and man-made disasters and calamities, weak state structures, etc.

Mr. President,

One of the most important issues, in the light of the particularly threatening nexus of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, is the principle of the non-use of force. When examining it one may have a look into the following aspects — anticipatory self-defense, humanitarian intervention and collective use of force with an authorization of the Security Council.

The UN Charter has made absolutely clear that all UN member States should refrain from the threat or use of force. As the security begins at home, each State should be responsible for its own security. It is the domestic institutions and policies, which are in the first line, relevant to the maintenance of internal peace and order. The United Nations can afford its sole assistance only when a state is incapable to act. Its assistance should be supplemented by that of regional or sub-regional organizations.

However, in a case when a state cannot or is unwilling to protect its citizens from such atrocities as gross violation of human rights, ethnic cleansing, acts of terror and genocide, the international community has not only the right, but also the responsibility to act.

Moreover, this responsibility depends not only on the legality of undertaken decisions and actions, but also on the common perception of their legitimacy. The legitimacy reflecting

universal values and principles could, in turn, facilitate the forging of a consensus when a next Rwanda, Kosovo or Darfur comes along.

Mr. President,

We need a certain code of conduct, which will give us sufficient predictability as to how we as members of the United Nations will act on the international scene, when we will employ the United Nations as our instrument of choice, as well as how we will make the best use of its potential.

We have to develop this code while at the same time looking at the concrete and real tasks and challenges that rise before the Organization testing its credibility. I am, of course, referring in particular to the Iraqi crisis. The war in Iraq eroded seriously the climate of cooperation and consensus, and at the same time brought to the fore a host of questions on principles and practices whose implications for the Organization have yet to be addressed. To assure the credibility of the United Nations, we need to explore ways of bringing the UN back into Iraq. The Republic of Poland strongly supports UN engagement in Iraq, which would improve security in the county, speed up the process of the Iraqi democratization, institution building, and at the same time foster the climate of social and economic well-being of the Iraqi people.

Mr. President,

We also hope that the reform will strengthen the role of the United Nations as a community of values. The United Nations was born to unite its members against threats and enemies. Today, it should unite us also for a positive change regarding the consolidation of values such as human rights, democracy, social justice, and development, which constitute the backbone and the moral foundation of the mankind.

We believe that the United Nations is not just about providing stable international order, and it is not just about an effective balance of forces. It is in the first place about mobilizing the international community to ensure a better future for ow citizens. Let us bury the myth of the UN's neutrality. The United Nations should always be on the side of the fundamental values, values that lie at its foundation. The reform of the UN should strengthen the way in which the Organization promotes and executes its principles and implements them. If we fail to do that, we should be prepared that the moral leadership of the UN will be

seriously handicapped and the international community will organize itself to compensate for that.

When preparing future decisions, we should discuss not only the content but also the form. Poland believes that the best way to approach it is by having a political document, which would both spell out the reinforced message about the role, principles, and values, as well as contain the necessary institutional adjustments. We do definitely regard this document as something more than a set of amendments to the UN Charter.

These reforms may necessitate tough choices for a significant number of member States. Poland is in a comfortable situation. We do not seek any national gains, we do not aspire for new roles or seats, and neither do we risk losing our influences. We can solely appeal to our partners to look at their particular interests with a broader and a more open perspective.

We have to change completely the way we perceive the United Nations. For many years most of our countries have been asking themselves what we can get from the Organization. Today, when the Organization is facing so many new challenges and problems we can ask ourselves what we should offer it in order to make it work better and more efficiently for the benefit of international community.

Thank you for your attention.