



Statement

by H.E. Mr. Vartan OSKANYAN

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

**at the General Debate
of the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly**

18 September 2005

New York

Mr. President,

We warmly welcome you to your position and we know we will enjoy working with you. And to the outgoing President, our special thanks for his engagement and contribution to our work.

Mr. President,

When the Millennium Summit was held in 2000, in another New York, in another era, before unspeakable security challenges overtook our agendas, it was the lack of universal economic development that was our supreme security challenge.

That is why the Millennium Development Goals were born. It took the will and determination of nearly 200 world leaders to put forward eight straightforward, obvious objectives which can be summed up in Amartya Sen's eloquent postulation: Development is Freedom.

In these five years, these goals have become no less imperative. Pretending that anything less will do in this era of huge wealth creation is disingenuous and dangerous and unfair.

If global security is our focus, and we are convinced that the road to security is through democracy, then we must remember Eleanor Roosevelt, who nearly 60 years ago, in working on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articulated the obvious: men in need are not free men.

It is only through the achievement of these goals that man will live 'in greater freedom'.

Mr. President,

In Armenia, where economic resources are limited, but our people's will is great, we have been able to register high economic growth. Yet, the challenge – ours and the world's – is to turn economic achievements into human development advances.

Armenia looks forward to each year's Human Development Report because it's like a report card. Fortunately, each year, we have received a good report card, we have recorded forward movement, we have recorded improvement. This year, we have placed number 83, ahead of all our neighbors.

We should not underestimate these gains. But if we're going to be fair and forward-looking, then neither should we exaggerate them. We must look at the promise of this index and see in it that there are gaps we must close.

First, We must target ways to accelerate poverty reduction. A society is judged by how it deals with those most vulnerable. In Armenia, poverty is concentrated in the rural areas. We must ensure that our high economic growth trickles down to the individual families outside cities and in the regions. So, economic development for us means integrated rural development, it means identifying and encouraging the conditions which favor development and enable unleashing production capacity. Just as the MDGs require a partnership between rich and poor countries, we must foster partnership between the rich and poor in our country, thus stepping up the pace of development.

Second, we are turning democracy into a tool for development. Democratic institutions and processes are not just ends. They are also means to creating the necessary political and economic environment which lead to distributed growth and dignified development. The cruelties inherent in the process of massive economic readjustment which we have been undergoing have led to a sense of powerlessness on the part of ordinary citizens. Stable, consistent, transparent, strong democratic institutions empower each citizen. Democracy is more than elections. Democracy is institutions which are egalitarian and predictable and constrain the actions of the elite thus preventing uneven playing fields. In other words, we need strong democratic institutions and legislation to guard against the weaknesses of human nature.

We will not continue to be satisfied at being ahead of our neighbors, in the middle tier of all of the countries of the world. Being there today is satisfactory only because we have demonstrated that against all odds, despite geography, in spite of history, we know how to survive.

Mr. President,

Armenia is a small land-locked country with few natural resources. We've become accustomed to saying that our greatest natural resource is our people, because indeed all the other resources which exist in the countries around us – oil and gas – are not to be found on our territory.

But, Mr. President, I can tell you that if we did have oil, we would use oil revenues to double our education budget, because education is essential for change, because education creates new dreams and the ability to fulfill those dreams.

We would use those oil revenues to double our social security budget because there are still painful gaps between our people's dreams and prospects.

We would use the money to double our environmental protection effort, because it is the surest investment plan that a country can have.

Mr. President, what we would not do is double our military budget. What we would not do is create an imaginary external threat to legitimize our inactions. We would not pretend that there are simplistic, zealous remedies to complex social, economic and political challenges. In other words, we would not presume that military force is a tool either in domestic or foreign policy. Military force is not an option in ruling people.

Mr. President, when it comes to regional conflicts, advocating military solutions is not only unrealistic, but it demonstrates a patent lack of understanding of democracy, human rights and rule of law. The founders of the United Nations knew that security, development and human rights go together.

Self-determination is a human right, Mr. President. The people of Nagorno Karabakh fought for and earned the right to self-determination. To do that, they resisted the political and military aggression of a government not-of-their-own-choosing that tried to violently, fiercely, brutally, suppress them. Fighting for their rights was not a matter of choice. Their rights were neither abstract nor excessive. What they wanted is what most of us have – the right to live peacefully on our lands, in our homes, safe from violence. Against all odds, they succeeded. Since then, they have demonstrated the ability to govern themselves, to develop democratic institutions and sustain their independence.

Mr. President, countries like mine come to these annual meetings with huge expectations. We come wanting to participate, contribute, give and take.

If the Foreign Minister of a country that is obviously small and, frankly, imperfect, doesn't have the right to moralize about our collective future, then allow me to just for a moment, to dream as a citizen of the world.

The prospect of UN reforms has been the beginning of a promise of a world that looks a bit more like OUR world today. Mr. President, we may not agree here, now, this week, this year, but we will have to agree on reforming this institution some time. We cannot pretend that we don't know our history, that we don't clearly see the realities facing us, that we don't know that the world has changed. It is not 1945 any longer.

Still, it is reassuring that the principles enshrined in the UN charter written three generations ago remain significant. That's because the spirit of San Francisco in 1945, the global compact that was forged, was a revolution. It affirmed that generations are accountable to future ones, that states are accountable to each other, and that together, states can, must, guarantee peace in the world. The formula by which they agreed to achieve that goal worked.

Today, we need to rework the formula, to reaffirm the responsibility and accountability of states to their citizens, of states to one another, of international

institutions to their members. We need the democratization of international relations, of international institutions, and we need fair representation, earned representation around the decision-making table.

Earned representation Mr. President: where states engaged in promoting and protecting human rights and rule of law have the right to be presented on the Human Rights Council, states serious about democratic and economic development have the opportunity to be part of the Economic and Social Council, and where states committed to the progress and dignity of the international community have the opportunity to be part of the leadership of the world community.

There is nothing ambitious about these goals. It is natural that national interests will differ. That is why this international institution must step in to fill that gap by assuring participation and cooperation, in exchange for commitments and action.

Mr. President,

It's all about being accountable to our children. What if we don't achieve the MDGs even as the world economy continues to create wealth, and half the world's population continues to find the fruits of that wealth out of reach? How do we explain this to our children?

What if we, in our region, don't take this opportunity to make the peace and leave behind the war, its memories, its consequences, its social, economic, emotional legacy? Then, what are we leaving our children?

What if we don't learn from the past, reject our collective 'responsibility to protect' and allow yet again and again governments to plan and carry out torture, ethnic cleansing, genocide against their citizens? How will we face our children?

When the UN was formed, following two great world wars, it gave the people of the world hope, faith, in their leaders, in their future, for the lives of their children.

Today, following huge catastrophes – manmade and natural – it seems that the peoples of the world need again to have their faith restored. Devastation like that caused by the tsunami and Katrina, violence such as that being perpetrated in Darfur, carnage that we witnessed in London, make us question ourselves, our neighbors, our assumptions.

Our answers to ourselves and our children must be about united momentum, united resources, united responses, by nations, united. The United Nations can still be that answer.

Thank you, Mr. President.