



**PERMANENT MISSION OF
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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61st SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK, 21 SEPTEMBER 2006

Madam President, distinguished delegates,

1. Five years after the destruction of the Twin Towers and just a few days after the commemoration of this terrible tragedy, I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to the people of this great city, which serves as mankind's meeting point.
2. Last year, I stressed our collective responsibility to protect tolerance from intolerance. I spoke of freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Today I should like to revisit this theme. But: in addition I will discuss the relationship between fighting terrorism and respecting human rights, the search for peace in the Middle East, and reform of the United Nations. And moreover: I will also renew my call for intensified dialogue. Only dialogue - at all levels of society - leads to more knowledge about each other and often to more mutual understanding.

Madam President,

(Human rights and the campaign against Terrorism)

3. The threat of terrorism has not subsided. To fully understand the nature of the challenge we face, we have to ask ourselves what terrorists are aiming for. They aspire to undermine a society based on democracy, fundamental freedoms, human rights and the quest for progress. In their view there is no place for the principles and tenets of our free society. Instead, they try, by means of terror and violence to impose their views of the world on others.
4. As to the means used by terrorists, there can be no doubt that large-scale and systematic terrorist acts qualify as crimes against humanity under international law. While civilized societies uphold international legal and moral standards in defending themselves, terrorists completely reject the central principles of international law.
5. Our campaign against this threat must be fought with great determination by all of us. Indiscriminate violence must be countered by the collective will to defend our values, in order to protect our civilization and human dignity.
6. In order for this campaign to be successful in the long run, we must also place great emphasis on development, fair trade and dialogue. Unlike those who have a perspective on a better life by access to education and jobs, people without prospects and without a voice are more easily lured by the Siren call of hatred. To deal with that issue is one of the core missions of the United Nations. We - all nations of the UN - have a collective responsibility to give people a future and a voice so that they can improve their lives.
7. Extremists cleverly seek to exploit the freedom of open societies with the aim of destroying that very freedom. This confronts us with a dilemma: do we close our societies in self-defence, thus becoming more like the evil we face? Or do we remain open societies, and accept a certain degree of vulnerability?

8. Anti-terrorism measures can only be effective if adopted within the context of the human rights commitments we have undertaken *Ultimately*, our defence should not come at the expense of the very values upon which our societies are founded. Our citizens *must* be able to distinguish between the societies in which they lead productive lives, and the terrorist movements for whom human life has little value.
9. I am happy with the agreement we reached on the UN strategy on counter-terrorism. Now, we must see to its implementation. It is also in our collective interest to conclude a terrorism *convention* as well.

Madam President,

(Interfaith Dialogue and Human Rights)

10. The need for interfaith and intercultural dialogue is as great as ever. During and after the so-called cartoon crisis, I engaged in discussions with colleagues and the media in Asia and the Middle East. We talked about the freedom of expression and the freedom of religion; and I discovered such personal efforts are crucial in finding common ground. One of the initiatives we have taken is to host the annual Asian-European conference on interfaith dialogue in Amsterdam in 2008.
11. For any interfaith dialogue to be meaningful, respect for diversity is a precondition. In our view, all the world's nationalities, religions, and beliefs should live side by side, united by a tradition of pluralism, democracy and the rule of law.
12. According to international instruments to which we all subscribe, respect for diversity means, for example, freedom of religion and belief. This includes the freedom to adhere to any religion or no religion at all. In my country - and in many others as well - an individual is free to be a Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu or adhere to any other belief. This philosophy includes the right to *change* one's belief, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states.
13. We believe that the separation of church and state, and the independence of the courts, are the best guarantees that nobody has the power to impose his beliefs on others. Freedom of religion and freedom of expression are two sides of the same coin. Does this mean that people can say whatever they want? No. The right to free speech does not entitle a person to insult others. But restrictions on the freedom of expression must never go further than what is 'necessary within a democratic society'.
14. In individual cases where the freedom of expression conflicts with legitimate restrictions it is up to courts, not governments, to decide which principle should prevail.

(Middle East)

15. Peace in the Middle East would reinforce a global spirit of dialogue. We have a reason to be optimistic. Resolution 1701 ended hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, unfortunately only after many innocent civilians had lost their lives.

16. I commend the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts to promote the resolution's effective implementation.
17. The new UNIFIL is an important symbol of hope. Peacekeepers of different religious and cultural backgrounds are working together under the skyblue banner of the United Nations. As they have been doing in the Great Lakes region in Africa and will hopefully soon be doing in Darfur, Sudan. I am proud of the fact that several member states of the European Union, together with Turkey, China and Indonesia, provide the backbone of UNIFIL. The Netherlands is actively considering to contribute to its maritime component.
18. Practical implementation will depend on the cooperation of all parties and countries in the region and beyond, including Syria and Iran. I call upon them to act in accordance with resolution 1701.
19. Regional peace also requires resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Israeli- Syrian dispute. I call upon all parties involved to seize the political momentum created by resolution 1701 and engage in serious dialogue. The Quartet could, at the request of the Security Council, outline a comprehensive Middle East settlement.

(UN reform)

Madam President,

20. In this world, we need the United Nations to manage change, rather than lagging behind.
21. We need to renew and reinvigorate the United Nations. Last year's summit was devoted to that very task. We have made substantial progress since then, but more needs to be done.
22. My country's vision of an effective UN includes less fragmentation, more concentration and more synergy. We need a United Nations that cuts red tape, rather than create more bureaucracy. For example, in an interdependent world it makes no sense to have thirty-eight different UN humanitarian and development agencies. That is why we have suggested one office, one programme, one representative and one financial mechanism at country level.
23. My vision of the United Nations encompasses a Peacebuilding Commission that focuses on critical peacebuilding needs, and a Human Rights Council that is the single most authoritative voice on human rights. It is a United Nations led by a Secretary-General with greater authority to determine the optimal use of human and other resources than is the case at present.
24. As an active member of the United Nations, the Netherlands will continue to contribute to the best of its ability to turn this vision into reality. The Netherlands does not just preach but delivers. For more than 60 years, ever since the foundation of the UN, we have provided means, ideas and people. And of course we remain committed to its cause.

25. Security Council reform is a difficult part of the overall UN-reform agenda. A pragmatic approach would be to opt for a temporary solution that could be modified after, say, ten years. The world is dynamic and the Security Council's composition should reflect this. The geopolitical realities of today might not be the geopolitical realities of tomorrow.

Madam President,

26. We should focus on the longer-term gains we all benefit from, rather than on short-term progress at the expense of others. Let us work to make the United Nations operate in a less antagonistic way. We have successfully tried that in the Group of Friends for the Reform of the United Nations, in which different countries, including the Netherlands, engage in constructive debate to arrive at solutions that are acceptable to all.
27. The United Nations is beset by problems that require major reforms. We are united by the opportunities and challenges of our time. In promoting peace and stability, in debating human rights issues, or in combating extreme poverty, we are compelled to work together and to coordinate our actions. Let us adopt a twenty-first century mentality to address twenty-first century problems. Now is the time to align our agendas and shoulder our responsibilities together. A strong United Nations strengthens us all.
28. Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the commitment and determination he has shown in pursuit of a better world with a United Nations that works effectively for the security, safety and well-being of people everywhere. Even the rocks of which he spoke seemed a light burden under his stewardship. We commend him for achieving tangible results in the area of crisis management and conflict prevention and for furthering the Millennium Development Goals. Secretary-General Annan's personal performance has brought hope and optimism in the hearts of citizens all over the world.

Thank you