



PERMANENT MISSION OF PORTUGAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement by

**H. E. Mr. José Sócrates
Prime-Minister of Portugal**

**On the occasion of the General Debate of the
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General Assembly**

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Madam President
Mr. Secretary General
Distinguished Delegates

1. I would like to start by extending my warmest congratulations to Her Excellency **Madam Haya Al Khalifa**, the first woman in nearly forty years to take up the position of President of this General Assembly. I wish you, Madam President, every success for the mandate you are now beginning and you can be assured of Portugal's firm support as you carry out your duties. We are confident that you will give continuity to the excellent work of your predecessor, Minister Jan Eliasson.

2. This General Assembly is marked, however, as the last one in which **Secretary General Kofi Annan** is in office. I wish to express here, on behalf of the Portuguese people, our deepfelt appreciation for the way you carried your office over these last ten years, contributing in a concrete way to international peace and stability in a world we all wish more just.

More than any words, our praise for his work is best expressed, however, by following his example.

3. It was on his watch – and with his indispensable help – that we saw the birth of the new State of East Timor. Portugal will not forget that this was one of the great recent victories of the UN, in the peoples' fight for self-determination, and in defense of the values contained in our Charter.

The United Nations have carried out a crucial task in that country, in helping to maintain peace, consolidate the Rule of Law and, together with donor countries, in creating the foundations for a more prosperous economic and social future for the Timorese people.

There is still a long path to travel. But it is important that the Timorese people be aware that that they can count on the United Nations. The recent internal crisis

has raised a serious question regarding security, and it is vital that they it is resolved if the country is to find stability.

We thus applaud the United Nations Peace Mission in East Timor, which represents the continuity of the significant investment made by the International Community and, more specifically by the United Nations, in East Timor. Portugal's active and resolute involvement in this mission is consistent with its on-going commitment to East Timor's political process over more than a decade.

I would also like to pay tribute to the memory of Sérgio Vieira de Mello, brutally murdered three years ago in Baghdad. We will not forget all that he did for the just cause of the Timorese people, and for the values that the United Nations embodies.

Madam President,

4. The last decade has been one of great changes. The United Nations have had undoubted successes but there have also been missed opportunities. We cannot afford to make the same mistakes again. Many accuse this Organization of undue complexity, slowness in its decision-making process, and even excessive bureaucracy. But if there is something that we all have learned is that there is no alternative to multilateralism, where the United Nations plays a determinant role.

The United Nations is one of the greatest guarantees for our collective security. Our duty is to preserve it and reinforce it. It is an investment from which we all have to benefit. Each one of us is a Member of this Organization not only to serve and promote our own national interests but also – and I would say above all – to fulfill the hopes and dreams of the people of the whole world.

The world today is full of risks and threats which no country can stand up to alone. If we do not attempt joining forces, we are halfway down the road to failure. Reality has proven this.

I underline here Portugal's commitment towards multilateralism, for we strongly believe that this path is where one can better uphold the essential values of peace and development.

5. A big part of this multilateral action rests on a dialogue between cultures and civilizations. This is a collective responsibility through which we can overcome obstacles, prejudices and, principally, ignorance. Our challenge here is not to limit ourselves to mere declarations but to take firm and concrete steps towards greater interaction between peoples and cultures.

Despite the huge uncertainties and misunderstandings in the world today, we have a set of principles – contained in our Charter – that can inspire us and guide us. They are our best help.

But the dialogue between cultures and civilizations also imposes demanding domestic political agendas, in the respect for differences and the inclusion of all citizens in their society, no matter what their beliefs or religions.

On the other hand, it also imposes steps forward in international trade and in strengthening the economic bonds between North and South. The strengthening of world trade mechanisms constitutes an investment in our own security, as well as an important part of that dialogue. Thus the importance of overcoming the obstacles of the Doha round in the context of the current negotiations in the WTO. If a result is to be reached, we must all be ready to give up a little so that ultimately everyone can win.

Madam President

6. One of the biggest challenges we face in this dialogue of cultures and civilizations is undoubtedly the Middle East. This region remains one of the main focus of instability in the world. We all have present the painful images of the recent crisis in Lebanon, where we witnessed the suffering of civilians on both sides of the conflict. That only strengthens the need to actively pursue a permanent and balanced solution, which may allow for a dynamics of hope and peace in the region.

The Middle East is not a military issue. It is, above all, a political and diplomatic challenge.

We should not, then, miss the window of opportunity offered by Resolution 1701 of the Security Council. It is a challenge where the United Nations and the European Union take shared responsibilities in promoting peace and stability, through an effective multilateralism.

Portugal fulfils its duty and supports the urgent implementation of the resolution, and we are present in UNIFIL, so as to help implement that resolution.

Madam President

7. I wish to bring your attention, once more, to Africa. Portugal has given great attention and efforts to this continent, which we cannot allow to be forgotten. There is progress to be encouraged, as well as historical responsibilities to which the developed world cannot turn its back.

I am pleased to stress the determination with which the European Union has been reinforcing its partnership with Africa. The current drafting of an Euro-African Joint Strategy will lead to a "script" for our relations with Africa in the fundamental areas of peace and security, good governance and human rights, regional trade and integration, and human development.

I stress the word "joint". All of us share the responsibility – Africans and Europeans alike. I trust that the conditions will prevail in the near future for this Strategy to be adopted. And I hope it will be, at the highest level, when we hold in Lisbon the II EU-Africa Summit.

In recent years, with the consolidation of the African Union and various regional organizations and initiatives, very significant progress has been made in many fields and this has been driven by the continent itself and its institutions. It is our duty to recognize these developments and support them with renewed vigor.

8. I would also like to recall that last July, in Bissau, the **Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries** celebrated its 10th anniversary. This

Organization has been consolidating itself and reinforcing its involvement within the United Nations system, where it currently holds observer status, presenting itself as a credible organization in the fostering of international partnerships with bilateral and multilateral entities with a view to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals.

In Bissau we pledged our commitment to reach the Millennium Development Goals, by defining and implementing a general cooperation strategy in which fulfilling them is the priority. This is also our priority. We shall implement it, within a bilateral and multilateral cooperation strategy that may speed up the fight against poverty, alleviate the pressure on migratory fluxes, and promote sustainable development.

9. September in New York must not be an annual pilgrimage to rediscover this Organization. At the end of the day, each and every one of us holds the credibility of the UN in our hands.

We all face the same challenges. But, at the same time, they provide us with the opportunity to live in accordance with our ideals and put into practice the principles that have guided us for more than six decades. The only way out is to look for answers together.

That is why we need a stronger and more cohesive United Nations.

We owe this to ourselves. We owe this to future generations.

Thank you.