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Speech by the President of the Republic of Finland Tarja Halonen at the 63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 23 September 2008

Let me first congratulate you, Mr President, for your election as the President of this 63rd General Assembly. We express our full support for your Presidency.

Let me also thank you Mr. Secretary General for your resolute efforts to promote United Nations and its values.

Finland aligns herself with the statement of the European Union.

Our world is facing unforeseen challenges like climate change and food crisis. Also the current economic turmoil requires decisive action. At the same time, we have not been able to rid ourselves of the conventional crisis. Unfortunately, armed conflicts are still a reality all over the world. Too often, we - the international community - are unable to agree on a common response. Too often, people affected by poverty and conflicts are let down.

The need to adapt the international architecture to these challenges is deeper than ever. We need an efficient UN to find common solutions for our future. The UN represents collective security in its most global form. Finland is committed to building a more secure, fair and just world through a reformed and credible UN.

I had the pleasure of presenting the Final Report of the Helsinki Process on Globalisation and Democracy to the Secretary General earlier this week. The main political message of this joint initiative of Finland and Tanzania is that some of the challenges posed by globalisation can only be solved through multi-stakeholder dialogue, and that the United Nations could play an important role in facilitating and developing new practices for such cooperation.

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Climate change must be addressed with vigour. Otherwise it can wipe out our achievements in the field of sustainable development and even bring into question the whole future of mankind. Recent extreme weather phenomena can be a serious indication of the challenges we are about to face. Multilateral engagement and shared responsibility are the only effective means to tackle this global menace. Others' indifference is no excuse for inaction. Climate change is a matter of our responsibility to future generations. There is no place for petty politics and recrimination.

The UN has to play a leading role in the global response to climate change. We must reach a comprehensive global agreement on a new international climate regime. The Copenhagen climate conference takes place already in December next year. It is evident that global commitments need to be implemented and supplemented also by national and regional action.

Industrialised countries have to bear their share on mitigating climate change. However, international negotiations on the new climate regime cannot succeed without extensive

participation from the developing countries. We must actively support the most vulnerable developing countries in adapting to and combating climate change.

There is mounting evidence that poverty, especially in rural areas, can be reduced by sustainable managing of natural resources. Forests are crucial in reducing greenhouse gases. Finland has a long history of sustainable forest management, and we understand its impact on rural development and employment. We would like the UN to intensify its efforts to assist governments and communities to improve their capacities for rural development and sustainable forest management. We are ready to work with others in this respect.

In mitigating climate change it is important to include all stakeholders, from NGOs to private enterprises, and from individual citizens to governments. We need everybody; it is necessary that also women can participate in this work.

I am pleased to be a co-host together with the President of Liberia, Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment in Liberia next March. This conference will explore climate change from a gender perspective. It will serve as a catalyst in addressing climate change, security, governance and leadership.

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Rising food prices is a challenge with world-wide consequences. Once again the poorest and the most vulnerable – women and children – suffer the most. Food shortages lead to deterioration of the diets and can provoke social unrest.

Effective government action and improved donor coordination are crucial in tackling the food crisis. The United Nations Comprehensive Framework for Action is an excellent initiative in addressing this global challenge.

Parallel to the short-term response, attention must be paid to medium and long-term policies in enhancing food security. Support to the rural sector is crucial for sustainable and equitable development, growth and well-being. Moreover, the promotion of good agricultural practices is among the best approaches to adaptation to climate change.

The increased food prices also provide opportunities. If developing countries are supported in the spirit of the Aid for Trade agenda, they can better take advantage of their agricultural potential, also for exporting. And we need to ensure, again, that both women and men benefit from support, keeping in mind that women produce most of the food in many developing countries.

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The UN currently deploys well over 100 000 military and civilian personnel in peacekeeping operations. This is a remarkable figure and we, the member states, must continue to support the UN efforts in this field. The UN and regional organisations should work closer together in carrying the burden in preventing and resolving conflicts.

Improving the efficiency and cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations remains a top priority. In Kosovo -- and most recently also in Georgia -- we continue to cooperate closely between the UN, the EU and the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Increased cooperation should also be extended to the African Union. A continued UN peacekeeping presence in Chad and in the Republic of Central Africa would contribute to wider stabilisation efforts both locally and regionally.

Tackling today's multifold conflicts requires a comprehensive approach to security. Trade, development policy and humanitarian aid need to be utilised alongside traditional crisis management tools. We have to take women and children into account in conflicts and post-conflict peace building.

We have made good decisions. We have to make them a reality. I am pleased to inform you that last Friday Finland published a national action plan on implementing the UN Security Council resolution 1325. We hope that more and more member countries will do the same.

Furthermore, there can be no sustainable peace without justice. Finland strongly supports the International Criminal Court in rejecting impunity for the most serious international crimes.

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I had the privilege to co-chair the Millennium Summit with President Sam Nujoma of Namibia eight years ago. We had the spirit and the courage to adopt the Millennium Declaration. We made a commitment on the Millennium Development Goals. It is our duty to fulfill these commitments. Africa requires our devoted attention and support as was agreed yesterday.

Today and in this room, it is once again time to pledge our joint commitment to the ideas and values of the United Nations. The Charter calls us “to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security.” While the concept of security has changed and become broader, it is upon us to follow this call of the Charter and translate it into action.