



PERMANENT MISSION OF  
THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

235 East 45<sup>th</sup> Street, 16<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10017

tel. (212) 519-9500  
fax (212) 370-1954  
[www.pvnewyork.org](http://www.pvnewyork.org)

---

check against delivery

STATEMENT BY

H.E. Dr. Jan Peter Balkenende

Prime Minister  
of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly

NEW YORK, 25 September 2008

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen,

When we started the General Assembly on Tuesday the Secretary General made important remarks about the Millennium Development Goals and the financial crisis. The world is witnessing extraordinary financial turbulence. And all parties must shoulder their responsibility.

At the same time, the current crisis should not distract us from the need to achieve the MDGs. What kind of world do we want to leave to our children and grandchildren?

Any parent who considers this question for a moment will answer: a world in which my children are safe, and can build decent lives, free from want. A world in which my children can reach their full potential, without fear of repression or terror. A world in which my children are free, their rights protected.

Everything we do as the United Nations is about these deep desires. There is a direct link between this UN building and the homes of hundreds of millions of families all over the world.

One man who forcefully reminded us that we are responsible for the opportunities open to future generations was Franklin D. Roosevelt. In early 1941, in the Second World War's darkest hour, he gave us his vision of the future: the dawn of a world in which people would enjoy freedom of expression and belief, and would be free from fear and want.

After the war, these freedoms became our moral compass. They were set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by this very Assembly almost sixty years ago. And human rights remain the cornerstone of Dutch policy.

If we look around us today, we can see that reality falls far short of our ideal. We still live in a world where, each year, over nine million children die before they are five. And every day millions of people live in fear of violence and abuse of power.

We cannot accept this. Together the United Nations comprise a *working* community and our work is not done. Not by a long way. Global challenges require global solutions. Global solutions require global action. Every one of us needs to ask ourselves: what am I doing to make freedom a reality for people at home and elsewhere?

### *Freedom from want*

What are we doing to bring about freedom from want?

In the last ten years, millions of people have managed to escape from poverty. In Asia and parts of Africa, a great deal of progress has been made, thanks to the efforts of many people. That progress should inspire hope as we continue to work towards the Millennium Development Goals.

There is still so much to do. In some countries the situation is actually getting worse, especially where health is concerned. One child still dies every three seconds. One mother every minute.

All governments need to realise that good and ethical governance is an essential foundation for development. And realising this, they must act accordingly. This also applies to the current financial crisis where urgent action is needed. The financial sector and regulators should quickly implement the recommendations of the Financial Stability Forum: stricter supervision, better risk management, greater transparency and enhanced accountability. This is how to restore confidence in the financial markets and prevent future crises. The IMF should play a central role in this process by further stepping up its financial sector oversight. Together we should re-establish the stability and integrity of the financial system.

Governments have a duty to provide food for their people. The international community will support all those who fight against hunger, want and disease. But we must do so as efficiently as possible. We must not waste resources: the need is too great. Above all, we must work together. We must work together with other governments, certainly, but also with the business community and civil society. Public-private partnership works. I meet more and more entrepreneurs who are committed to the Millennium Development Goals and actively want to help. Let us grasp the hands they extend.

Mr President, the Netherlands welcomes your initiative to place food security at the centre of this General Assembly. Rising food prices hit the poor hardest. The position of small farmers is particularly important. If they are able to increase production, not only will their own families benefit, but the local community too. That is why the Netherlands has earmarked extra funding for the development of agriculture in developing countries.

But there can be no food without water. Water is the source of all life. 1.8 billion people currently have no proper access to clean drinking water. Their health – their very lives – are in the balance. So the Netherlands has joined with countries that believe water is a human right. Because access to water is an essential part of freedom from want.

### *Freedom from fear*

What are we doing to ensure that second essential freedom: freedom from fear? Millions of people still live in the middle of conflict and violence. We must not accept this.

Over the last sixty years, UN peace operations have played an important role in ending conflict. In many areas the UN has ensured that dormant conflicts do not flare up again. So our efforts must continue, undiminished. Yet peace operations alone are not enough. A conflict's root cause is often a political dispute. And it often requires a political solution.

There is no place in a free society for torture. There is no place for the death penalty.

We all strive for a life without fear. Yet there are people who face fear every day in order to defend human rights. To recognise these brave people, the Netherlands has introduced the Human Rights Defenders Tulip, a special honour which will be awarded annually on International Human Rights Day.

In our free world, no one is above the law, and no one is beneath it.

The Netherlands is proud to host the legal capital of the world in the city of The Hague. We will continue to strive for an International Criminal Court that is supported by all UN member states.

In a safe world, right is stronger than might. Crimes that outrage world opinion must always be punished. The International Criminal Court is there to support us in that task. And we must support the Court. All of us. Openly. Unconditionally. A wider acceptance of the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice will also strengthen the international legal order.

### *Freedom of expression and belief*

Mr President, we also need to speak about freedom of expression and belief. The debate on this issue often leads to misunderstandings, incomprehension and fears that national traditions may be swept aside.

We can all be proud of our cultures and traditions. Of the things that distinguish us from others.

The challenge for every government is to affirm its people's cultural and religious values and customs, and at the same time build bridges with the rest of the world. Bridges that enable people, organisations and religions to meet and draw closer.

Finding the right balance is not simple. But it is essential.

Governments are there for everyone. For men and women. For people of all backgrounds and all religious convictions. For monks, priests, rabbis and imams. And equally for those who do not believe in a supreme being.

Religion offers people comfort and inspiration in their personal lives. A religion is not a system of dogmas that may be imposed on others by force. And it is certainly not a justification for using violence when one feels aggrieved.

Everyone is free to profess his or her faith. To change religion or not to believe. We must all cherish and defend the freedom of religion or belief. The same goes for the freedom of people to express their views. These freedoms go hand in hand.

We all know that there are countries in the world where these freedoms are violated. To those countries I say: respect the right of every person to freedom of religion and freedom of expression. They are universal rights. They are universal freedoms.

At the same time, we must remind everyone who enjoys these freedoms of their responsibility – the responsibility to show the same respect to others that we claim for ourselves.

### *Conclusion*

Mr President, we need the United Nations to ensure these four essential freedoms for which we stand. And the United Nations needs us. A strong United Nations is one in which universal values are central. A UN with a fair and balanced Human Rights Council. A UN that unites and delivers.

When we began building the United Nations together, the number of countries worldwide in which people enjoyed a reasonable level of freedom was around fifteen per cent of the total. Today, more than sixty per cent of countries can be called 'free'.

In the same period, the number of people suffering from malnutrition has fallen by several hundred million.

The number of armed conflicts is also declining, however serious the situation remains in certain troubled regions.

Progress is possible. But it doesn't happen by itself. For the Netherlands, this is an incentive to continue working, heart and soul, for 'a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief, and freedom from fear and want'.

In conclusion, let me echo President Roosevelt's words: 'The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilised society.'

Thank you.