

# United Nations Nations Unies

THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

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## **Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine**

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with sincere pleasure that I join you here today on this pious and joyful occasion. I would like to thank the congregation of Saint John the Divine for the invitation. I would also like to applaud your activities in support of the United Nations.

Earlier this week, I assumed the post of President of the United Nations General Assembly. I am deeply honored to become part of the organization and to be given the opportunity to contribute in my humble way to the promotion of its principles and purposes.

During my political career I have been a witness to the strong influence of the ideals and principles upon which the United Nations was founded. The United Nations has without a doubt significantly contributed to the acceleration of the political changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe, namely through the United Nations conventions on human and civic rights. For me, the ideals of the United Nations have been an important source of inspiration, during the more than twenty years that I spent in forced exile working towards a change of the regime in my own country. I realized how important it is to persist in the efforts to uphold these ideals and not to become disheartened by obstacles or by the lack of immediate results.

The United Nations was born from the destruction, death and distress of the Second World War. It was created with a vision that such horrifying crimes against humanity may never be repeated. The Member States have resolved to join their efforts in maintaining friendly relations, promoting economic and social advancement, solving humanitarian problems, and respecting human rights and dignity.

The organization has made tangible progress in its quest to fulfill these ideals, becoming instrumental in defining policies and assisting to bring about measurable change. Nonetheless, destruction, death and distress are still everyday reality for too many people in the world. I believe that this does not imply that the United Nations has failed to deliver. In my view, it testifies to the complexity of the evolving and emerging challenges to peace, security, prosperity and sustainable development. In today's world, there remains an urgent need for a focused and committed resolve to tackle these problems, wherever and however they are manifested.

We live in an increasingly interdependent world. We are on the way from rural to a global village in which nothing happens in isolation. By the same token, no meaningful solution to our

challenges can be pursued in isolation. We need to engage in a concerted effort to bring about security, not only in its traditional political and military sense, but also economic, social, health, and environmental. We have started to refer to the objective of these concerted efforts as "human security." I see the role of the United Nations in the years ahead as a leader to promote this concept.

Human security is a people-centered principle. It is a principle that recognizes that people are granted security not only by the peace of arms, absence of tensions or violent crime, but also by socio-economic well-being, social justice, observance of human rights, application of national and international law, access to food and health care, education, and by sustaining the environment. Its realization weeds out people's basic insecurities and vulnerabilities. It improves the quality of life, widens opportunities for inclusion and participation in decision-making processes, and opens opportunities for personal fulfillment and enjoyment. It goes hand in hand with good and democratic governance.

At the turn of the millennium, the United Nations has set for itself several specific goals and targets that upon implementation will alleviate poverty and hunger, provide universal primary education, empower women, improve health conditions by combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, treat preventable diseases, reduce child mortality and improve maternal care, ensure environmental sustainability and develop partnerships for sustained economic growth. The task of realizing these commitments is enormous. It presents the organization with perhaps the greatest challenge it has ever faced and all of us with the urgency to demonstrate unqualified resolve and global responsibility.

I believe that in carrying out our work, we can be inspired by the values that are central to the Christian tradition. I see these values as transcendental, common to a multitude of faiths and religions, and pertinent to our everyday lives. For by love, understanding, and tolerance we bring greater peace, amity, and harmony to interactions with each other. By honoring freedom and dignity of every human being we break free of subjugation and empower ourselves to make our own decisions about our destinies, to grow, and to realize our potential. By respecting the equality of every human being we overpower oppression and discrimination, be it religious, ethnic or social. And by forgiveness and reconciliation we confront evil, overcome past injustices, and set on a course of building sound relationships.

By embracing these values, we embrace a more hopeful future. Allow me thus to be hopeful that upon being cognizant of the burdens faced by many people of this world, we will also be active in easing them for the advancement of entire humankind.

Expressing my deepest appreciation to all of you who have gathered here, let me affirm my belief that the United Nations will fulfill the hopes that the world has placed upon it.