

7 April 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,  
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Global Agenda Forum on “The Role of the United Nations  
in Maintaining International Peace and Security”**

INTRODUCTION

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to talk to you about the role of the United Nations in maintenance of international peace and security. It might seem peculiar to speak on this subject at a time when the United Nations is confronted with, perhaps, the greatest misgivings about its role in maintenance of international peace and security in its fifty-seven-year long history. The discussion on this subject has perhaps never been greater and more crucial. It might therefore seem even more odd, at this juncture, to argue that the United Nations does have a role in maintenance of international peace and security. But it is precisely what I intend to do, as I am convinced that despite the recent failure of diplomacy in the United Nations Security Council, the Organization's role in securing safe, stable, and prosperous environment around the world remains indispensable.

At the outset, let me mention that there are six principle organs of the United Nations - they are the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat. The responsibility for maintaining peace and security belongs to the Security Council.

Recently, we have concentrated our attention on the most outstanding issue before the United Nations - the Iraqi crisis. This is no surprise. The Organization has just gone through one of the most intricate moments, which will without doubt resonate into its future. But its failure to obtain, in the Security Council, a workable multilateral solution to Iraq's defiance of its resolutions, did not stop it from fulfilling its multitude of mandates. The work of the United Nations in the area of peace and security is broad. It includes peacekeeping, peace-building, disarmament, clearing of landmines, electoral assistance, development and exercise of international law, (for example through the International Criminal Court or the tribunals), to name some of the most well-known ones.

In my opinion, the frequently heard obituaries to the United Nations, particularly with respect to its role in maintaining peace and security, stem just from the lack of thorough knowledge and examination of the Organization's broad mandate and day-to-day activities. Allow me thus elaborate on the work of the Organization in the area of maintaining peace and security, on the accomplishments, as well as limitations.

## MAINTENANCE OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY AS A PRINCIPLE MANDATE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations was created on the ruins of the Second World War. Inherently, the victorious powers were establishing a new organization with one predominant objective in mind: to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war. To this end, the states were to practice tolerance, good neighbourliness and cooperation. The primary objectives with respect to maintenance of international peace and security are defined right at the outset of the United Nations' Charter. Its first chapter states, *inter alia*, that to maintain international peace and security, Member States are to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustments or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of peace. It further envisions development of friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and taking other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace. Among the means, economic and social cooperation, cultural exchange, promotion of respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion are also stated.

The United Nations has forged various structures to carry out this mandate, such as for peacekeeping, peacemaking, mediation, or using its good offices. United Nations Peacekeeping Forces were rewarded with a Nobel Peace Prize in 1988 and the Organization as a whole was awarded the prize in 2001. In the course of the last decade, the operations have become more complex and besides its traditional function of observing cease-fires and implementation of peace agreements, it has taken on the responsibility of post-conflict peace-building.

## LAYING DOWN THE FOUNDATIONS

When laying down a blueprint for the new organization, in the late summer and early fall of 1944, in Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C., and later during drafting of the Charter at the San Francisco Conference in the spring of 1945, one of the main concerns of the victorious states was the separation of powers between the General Assembly and the Security Council, giving them a distinct mandate with respect to maintenance of peace and security. Consequently, the primary responsibility for maintenance of international peace and security was assigned to the Security Council, leaving the General Assembly with a secondary, largely deliberative, role.

While constructing the new organization and assigning its principle organs their powers, the founding states could not have foreseen that the Cold War would impede the Security Council in carrying out its chief mandate. The frequent use of veto by its five permanent members, especially by the Soviet Union, caused the Security Council to be paralyzed to effectively deal with threats to and breaches of international peace and security and to forestall conflicts. Invasion of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan, war in Vietnam or Falklands/Malvinas, and others, unveiled before the eyes of the Security Council, a body paralysed by the bipolar rivalry and

frequent use of veto. As the Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali observed, 127 wars erupted during the first fifty years of the United Nations' existence. The attributes "powerless" or "irrelevant" are, by no means, new additions into the UN word list.

## UN SECURITY MACHINERY

The end of the Cold War brought a new promise for the world organization. Some spoke of a renaissance, especially in the security area. The optimism about finally putting the system of collective security into work was underpinned by the authorization of the Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf in 1991. It soon became apparent, however, that the post-Cold War reality would be more complex. Intrastate conflicts, fuelled by separatism, nationalism, in which civilians were increasingly the primary victims, proliferated. The United Nations had before it the enormous task of dealing with these military and humanitarian emergencies, and it was largely unequipped and unprepared.

Although not originally envisioned in the Charter, the traditional UN involvement with respect to peace and security have been its peacekeeping operations. Known widely as "blue helmets," United Nations peacekeepers monitor ceasefires, patrol buffer zones between hostile parties, and help defuse local conflicts. The first peacekeeping operation was in 1948 UN Truce Supervision Operation - UNTSO - to supervise truce between the Israelis and the Palestinians, followed by peacekeeping operation in Kashmir, Cyprus, Golan Heights, Lebanon, Western Sahara, and currently in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Kosovo, Central America, and many other places.

Throughout the years, the United Nations peacekeeping went through several phases. By the 1990s, the peacekeeping operations increased not only in their number (18 authorized during the Cold War as opposed to more than thirty in the 1990s), but also in their complexity. Their mandates now also include alleviating humanitarian emergencies, assistance in establishment of legitimate and functioning government and institutions, or, in the interim, taking these powers on themselves, election organizing, reorganizing and training of police and military forces, weapons collection and demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.

The United Nations currently operates 15 peacekeeping missions, in addition to peace-building missions. Among its recent achievements are the closing of UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and UN Mission in Prevlaka, establishing a mission in Timor Leste with a new mandate to support the transitional period, and disarmament and demobilization of over 47,000 rebel fighters in Sierra Leone. The United Nations plays an essential role in the re-building of Afghanistan.

## ROLE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Having the privilege of presiding over the General Assembly, I cannot refrain from highlighting the role of this body in international security. The General Assembly, in general, considers a wide

range of global issues, elects members to United Nations' bodies, allocates funds from the budget. It is the only principle organ of the Organization in which all the Member States are represented and participate on an equal basis, that is one vote per Member State. Currently, there are 191 Member States. It provides the membership with a forum to articulate their positions, air their grievances, find consensus and engage in diplomatic exchange. The General Assembly has, throughout its history, considered situations which have not yet developed into a conflict but have such a potential, disputes between nations, breaches of peace, or acts of aggression, violations of territorial integrity or political independence, colonialism, or self-determination.

Its decisions in respect to resolving disputes and conflicts are, albeit, not binding and serve merely as recommendations. They usually take the form of an appeal for peaceful settlement and of encouragement of conciliatory policy to relieve tensions. They may contain concrete proposals for specific action and set forward objectives, ask the parties to the dispute to take necessary steps to overcome the friction, request dialogue and negotiations. The General Assembly issues formal statements expressing disagreement or denunciations of specific situations of conflict, declaring hope that the solution can be found in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter. The General Assembly also expresses satisfaction with the course of action taken by way of adopting resolutions to that effect.

The General Assembly can also recommend that an issue is considered by its standing subsidiary organ or an appointed commission, or the Secretary-General and his special envoys through their good offices. The General Assembly can further initiate investigations, inquiries, studies, or progress reports.

It can also contribute indirectly through its agenda related to economic, social, cultural, educational, and health issues, and through development of international law. The contemporary understanding of the concept of security has become much broader and by heeding these issues and allocating roles for the relevant members of the UN system, the General Assembly's role in creating peaceful and secure conditions throughout the world has become more ample.

The agenda of the General Assembly with respect to international peace and security includes areas such as disarmament, human rights, humanitarian assistance, democratization, environmental degradation, terrorism, HIV/AIDS, or international law. The General Assembly discusses and reviews, on an annual basis, complex political and security situations in different regions, such as the situation in Afghanistan, Central America, the Balkans, the Middle East, several agenda items deal with conflict in Africa. It reviews the implementation of a de-mining program. Disarmament agenda is considered in the International Security and Disarmament Committee and questions of decolonization, peacekeeping operations, or peaceful uses of outer space are taken up by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee. Both of these belong to the General Assembly's six main committees.

I would like to emphasize that the concept of security has evolved. Today, the maintenance of peace and security is closely inter-linked with socio-economic security, respect for human rights and democratic values, which the United Nations has taken upon itself to promote. The General

Assembly has a particular role in promoting security by helping to establish the right socio-economic environment. Not surprisingly, there have been proposals for enhanced cooperation and dialogue between the Security Council, General Assembly, and the Economic and Social Council to enhance the Organization's capacity in dealing with the many aspects of security.

## MORE EMPHASIS ON PREVENTION

The United Nations has recently, largely due to the Secretary-General's emphasis on replacing the culture of reaction with culture of prevention, focused on the ways and means for effective conflict prevention before they escalate and become unmanageable. Historically, however, the United Nations has not been good at anticipating crisis situations and often dealt with the conflict after it had started. It needs to be said though, that the United Nations can only act after a request from a Member State. Its possibilities are thus limited.

The largely employed tool is preventive diplomacy, conducted predominantly by the Secretary-General or his envoys. Other options include preventive deployment, early warning, fact-finding missions, or confidence-building measures. I have myself included prevention of conflict among the priorities of my presidency, as I believe that the General Assembly should join the efforts in progressively building the culture of prevention. The General Assembly could identify and develop mechanisms for peaceful resolution of disputes, or, in other words, it could assemble a comprehensive compilation of elements for conflict prevention capacity to which the Member States and the UN system could refer to.

The General Assembly is currently in the process of drafting its first resolution devoted to ways and means of preventing armed conflict. These are challenging negotiations, as they reflect the multitude of different priorities, perspectives, and of course, interests. As prevention of conflict is one of the priorities of my presidency, I hope that the General Assembly will adopt, by consensus, a pragmatic resolution. The resolution should, inter alia, reaffirm the primary responsibility of Member States in conflict prevention. It should recognize the role of democratization, socio-economic development, or compliance with international law, as having a preventive value. The resolution should also determine the role of the relevant UN actors in conflict prevention and give an impetus to their greater cooperation in this area.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to say that it was my intention to portray the United Nations as a carrier of a multitude of agendas which aim at achieving a peaceful and secure world. I hope I have succeeded, for I believe that it would be greatly biased to engage in a discussion on the role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security without seeing the whole picture and without having an appreciation for its daily work that escapes the attention of the media. The role of the Organization with nearly universal membership in carrying out these tasks,

be it peacekeeping operations, mine clearance, disarmament of combatants, promotion of healthy socio-economic programs, or creation of international laws, is and will remain irreplaceable.