

9 May 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
at the 37th Plenary Assembly of WFUNA “The UN: Our Hope, Our
Future”**

Mr. President of the Gerialitat of Catalonia,
Mr. President of the Catalan Parliament,
Secretary General of Foreign Affairs,
Your Excellency Ambassador Donald Blinken,
Madam Bru,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to address the 37th Plenary Assembly of the World Federation of the United Nations Associations. I am pleased to be here today at this Assembly in the beautiful city of Barcelona, offer my support to you both as the current President of the General Assembly and also as a long-time supporter of our unique organization. I have been convinced of the great usefulness and relevance of the invaluable work of the UN for a very long time.

I was also glad to be involved in the interesting work of the UN Model conducted by the UN Association in the Czech Republic, both before I was elected President of the 57th session of the GA and since then. Retrospectively I can see that I had more illusions about the job of the President before I actually began to tackle all its tasks but the basic information I conveyed to our students was correct and truthful.

I am well informed about the enthusiastic activities of WFUNA - on local, national, regional and international levels. I am aware of the importance and continuous nature of the process to draw the attention of the civil society to the work of the United Nations and to encourage them to participate in it. I know from my personal experience both in the NGOs as well as in the government, that to obtain durable positive results one has to work rigorously and perseveringly. Fortunately, your efforts are bringing together those, who still believe in the noble goals of the United Nations. The discussion on how we work together towards a more effective and mutually supportive relationship to enhance our membership, is more relevant than ever.

Interaction between the United Nations and the civil society has grown significantly in the past decade. Thousands of non-governmental organizations now have formal consultative status at the United Nations and their number is growing. Partnership in the humanitarian and development areas has long been established; participation by the civil society has enriched the formal debates and influenced the outcome of many intergovernmental deliberations. Only a few years ago,

when the world leaders met in New York during the Millennium Summit, they expressed their firm commitment to the work of the United Nations. The partnership was discussed there and the Member States resolved to give greater opportunities to the non-governmental organizations and civil society to contribute to the realization of the Organization's goals and programmes. The Millennium Summit ended with the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals for the next decade and beyond. Thanks to your untiring engagement in promotion and dissemination of the Millennium Development Goals to the public at large, we can move this agenda forward.

The potential and importance of partnerships between the United Nations and civil society, multilateral organizations, the private sector, non-governmental and philanthropic organizations, economic, social, cultural and religious forces, academics, Nobel laureates, journalists as well as the volunteers in every community, to attain the Millennium Development Goals, is essential and represents the spirit embodied in the opening lines of the United Nations Charter "We, the peoples of the United Nations..."

I am deeply convinced that successful and timely implementation of the Millennium Development Goals will be not only a great UN contribution to the struggle against extreme poverty, and for the struggle for the provision of basic human needs from drinking water and basic health to education but at the same time it will target some of the causes of tensions and armed conflicts as well as intolerance and terrorism. If we are successful the world will be that much safer, saner and peaceful. The aim is to create conditions enabling all people to live in dignity, free of hunger, fear or oppression.

I fully support the work of WFUNA. I regard WFUNA's dual role of mobilizing civil society's support for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the valuable work in promoting support for the work of the United Nations among citizens of your own countries, as irreplaceable.

While establishing an agreed world agenda through the Millennium Development Goals, as the common policy framework for the entire United Nations system, the Secretary-General has been continuing the process of reforming the United Nations to be more relevant to a globalizing world, more efficient, more open and creative. In "An Agenda for Further Change", submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly for its approval, the issue of promoting partnerships was highlighted to further engage civil society in the work of the United Nations and to intensify the interaction. General Assembly, by its resolution 57/300, approved his intention to establish an independent panel, composed of people from different backgrounds - governments, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, parliaments - as well as eminent individuals from different regions of the world, to review the relationship between the United Nations and civil society and to make recommendations on how to improve it, including access to the UN and meaningful participation in policy debates, the identity of civil society actors, representational issues and other issues.

Such enhancement of mutual interaction is significant especially in these times, when we face numerous assertions and doubts about the present role of the United Nations and its future relevance.

The United Nations has a vast array of functions to implement its mandates. Its wide range of various bodies and activities are vital and still indispensable. The United Nations is needed, as the only legitimate forum to resolve problems that are transnational in scope and therefore cannot be solved by individual states; some examples - global warming, environmental degradation, fight against diseases such as SARS and HIV/AIDS, drug-trafficking, humanitarian crises, transnational crime, terrorism and so on.

The global community needs, more than ever before, to work together intensively and courageously, in order to build a more secure and rule-based world, in which human freedom and life in dignity, as well as private enterprise, can flourish. It is generally acknowledged that the global community has become interdependent, be it for trade and investments, or for solving the problems related to climate change, or eradicating poverty and terrorism. The quality of the international order, the good will and responsibility of all the nations, particularly the most powerful ones, are essential. We all have to work together to transfer global insecurity into global responsibility.

The United Nations is, of course, in constant need of reforms. Its chief mandate to maintain peace and security is implemented through the Security Council. If the United Nations is to remain a relevant international player in the coming decades, Member States should seriously consider the reform of the Security Council in its composition, size and the veto powers. A frustrating task of every General Assembly President for the last 10 years, has been to break a stalemate over Security Council reform, including the addition of some states as permanent members as well as an increase in the number of elected members and a certain restriction of the veto power.

The other area of reform relates to the strengthening of the United Nations, continuous process of small consecutive steps to render it more flexible and focused in its work and result-oriented.

It would be short-sighted to disregard the importance of the United Nations. I am sure, that the United Nations will play a vital role in post-conflict Iraq, as it has done previously in many similar post-conflict situations, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone and most recently Afghanistan. I still believe that the UN should not be reduced only to a provider of humanitarian aid but that it should play a vital role both in the economic reconstruction of Iraq and in its political transformation to a free and democratic Iraq. I believe that a constructive agreement between the UN Security Council and the US is in the best long-term interest of both the UN and the US. For all its shortcomings, real or perceived, the United Nations is still the only forum which has the grass roots experience and personnel to deal with a wide range of crises, whether in the field of humanitarian relief or helping people to rebuild their lives and countries, promoting human rights and the rule of law and peace-building. More recently, the General Assembly is engaged in promoting a culture of prevention rather than culture of reaction to conflict situations. 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 United Nations system could refer. After all, the United Nations is still the only universal organization within which 191 member countries can devise means of building sustainable peace.

In conclusion, let me express my gratitude for your untiring work and support of the United Nations. I firmly believe that your deliberations will continue to contribute to ensure the goal of a more humane world for our children and the generations to come.

Allow me one additional remark: Recently I frequently recall the real politic observation of British director Stanley Kubrick who once noted that great and powerful states frequently behave like gangsters and small states frequently behave like prostitutes. It is my conviction that the UN should by its work and by promotion of international law place certain restrictions on powerful states and by promotion of cooperation and solidarity empower more the small states so that in time Stanley Kubrick's observation will gradually become less and less true.