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**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,  
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,  
on “The United Nations, the United States and the Future of  
Multilateralism”, a Lecture Delivered at the National University, Dili,  
Timor-Leste**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, students, friends,

It is my pleasure and an honor to speak on this important topic that is so pertinent to our times. The discussion on how we work towards a more effective and mutually supportive relationship between the United Nations and the United States is directly linked to the future of multilateralism and its form. This discussion is more relevant today than ever, at a time when the United Nations is confronted with one of the most serious debates about its role in international relations. I believe that the United Nations indeed has a role to play, and its role in maintaining international order is indispensable, given that it is the only legitimate institution or forum in the world to which all nations have subscribed and in which we all have a stake.

Recently, the Iraqi crisis has seized – and rightly so - our attention as the most outstanding issue before the United Nations. The Security Council, the UN organ primarily responsible for maintenance of peace and security, failed to produce a workable multilateral solution to Iraq's defiance of its resolutions. The Organization has gone through one of the most intricate moments, which will surely resonate into its future. The lack of consensus demonstrated how differently the Member States understood and evaluated the situation in Iraq based on their diverse perspectives, historical experience and cultural backgrounds. It is also true that this crisis, once again, revealed some weaknesses and shortcomings in the multilateral intergovernmental processes that must be addressed in the future reform efforts.

I would caution, however, against the hasty and often-quoted comparison with the fate of the League of Nations and the frequently heard obituaries to the United Nations. The Organization's broad mandate and day-to-day activities range from fight against poverty and environmental degradation to protection of human rights encompassing such diverse issues as education, water scarcity or cultural heritage. And even in the area of peace and security, the UN agenda goes well beyond Iraq, including peacekeeping operations, most notably in Africa, disarmament, clearing of landmines, electoral assistance, and other post-conflict reconstruction activities.

It would be greatly biased to engage in a discussion on the role of the United Nations and its relationship with its Member States without seeing the whole picture of the multitude of agendas and without having an appreciation for its daily work in fulfilling its mandate. The role of the Organization with nearly universal membership in carrying out its tasks, be it peacekeeping

operations, disarmament, fight against poverty, or creation of international laws, has been and should remain essential.

The United Nations has always enjoyed a special relationship with the United States, its largest single contributor covering 22% of the organization's regular budget and over 27% of its budget for peacekeeping operations. Special, but never easy, (ranging from admiration and devotion to reservation or even suspicion). The United States has clashed with the UN on some issues - the Kyoto protocol, the Biological Weapons Convention, Convention on elimination of discrimination against women (CEDAW), or the International Criminal Court. The US' approach towards variety of topics on the UN agenda has resulted in growing perception among many UN Member States that the United States turns away from pursuing multilateralism in international relations in favor of unilateralism. This perception became more acute during the Iraqi crisis.

The divisions within the UN membership are obvious, and there is no point in hiding them. First and foremost, we need to work towards healing the rifts, particularly in the Security Council.

Iraq's post-conflict society is confronted with various problems of instability. These include unresolved issues relating to years of political and religious oppression, violence amongst different clans, dangers stemming from the past totalitarian structures, looting, or abundance of arms in the absence of an effective new local police or security forces. Recent UN experiences elsewhere have clearly demonstrated that a comprehensive strategy to tackle these issues in the immediate post-conflict phase is critical. Furthermore, it has become evident that a strategy for political and economic reforms should be crafted in conjunction with an overall vision for democratization of the Iraqi society.

While it is obvious that the coalition forces are responsible for military and civil administration of Iraq in the current period following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, I do believe that future substantial involvement of the UN in the transition is inevitable, especially given some of the problems US has to tackle on the ground and the increasing need to internationalise the stabilization forces and to share the burden. The role of the UN in Iraq should not be confined only to an advisory role or reduced to the provision of humanitarian or economic aid, but it has to gradually accept broader responsibilities aimed at promoting democracy in Iraq. I am convinced that an important role for the UN both in the economic reconstruction and in the political transformation is in the interests both of the US and the UN. They together could accelerate the transition towards democratic Iraq governed only by the Iraqis.

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, in conflict management and post-conflict peace-building. The UN has an extensive experience in post-conflict reconstruction from setting up UN administrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and, of course here in Timor-Leste, or in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone and most recently in Afghanistan. The United Nations is prepared to utilize this experience in order to assist the Iraqi people to rebuild their country.

I do believe that it is in the interest of both the United Nations and the US authorities to reach an agreement on mutually complimentary cooperation in that country which will further develop the principles expressed in the UNSC Resolution 1483. Such a cooperation will undoubtedly help to bring about the common aim – a democratic, free, independent and prosperous Iraq.

The past disagreement in the Security Council on the Iraqi crisis has reflected the contemporary international reality. In this respect, the visible disunity on the Iraqi crisis may have even proved to be beneficial to the international community since it focuses the attention on this very issue. As much as we need the idealism of the noble ideas that lead to the establishment of this Organization, we must be also guided by realism in the practical steps.

Although most visible on the question of Iraq, the rift is not only about Iraq. It's also, and foremost, about the functioning international system where one single nation – in this case the United States – possesses an unprecedented military and economic power. A nation so powerful that it can almost afford to ignore the entire international order. Almost, but not entirely. The United States needs the legitimacy and existence of a world order that only the UN can provide – at least in the eyes of the rest of the world. America's dependency on the UN's legitimacy is still relevant, and it might be the organization's opportunity to prove itself beneficial to its largest contributor.

The US participation in the UN continues to be important to America's global leadership. A weakened UN would ultimately mean more costly involvement for America in the world. On the other hand, America's absence in the Organization's activities would cripple the institution politically, as well as financially. The question before us is how to accommodate a member state that is so powerful militarily and economically, and to make the relationship most beneficial for both the United Nations and the United States.

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. Each nation, even the United States, the sole superpower with its economic, financial, military and technological dominance, is interconnected with and interdependent on others. 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.

Today, the number of areas where multilateral action is seen and needed is larger than ever. Let me emphasize the widely acknowledged fact that with globalization, problems cross national frontiers more freely than people, and therefore, concerted, multilateral action is the only way we can protect ourselves from concerns affecting the environment, proliferation of illicit drugs, biological and nuclear weapons, trafficking in human beings, poverty, and terrorism and others. An increasingly contentious area in which multilateralism applies is in regard to global issues

such as arms control, and human rights. In these areas, unilateralism tends to be associated with non-participation in or non-ratification of agreements. It is not clear, however, when a non-universal agreement to cooperate on a particular issue should acquire the same multilateral status as, for example, the United Nations Charter, or whether a state exercising its traditional sovereign right not to sign such a treaty should be branded as unilateralist. With these taxing issues, one can say that multilateralism is like an exercise in shared pain in the international sense.

It has to be acknowledged that multilateralism is not free of weaknesses. Certainly, multilateralism helps to share burdens, promote trust, and provide legitimacy for actions taken, for example, in response to a threat to peace and security. But multilateral approaches can also be ponderous, limiting action to the speed of the slowest or the most reluctant. Multilateralism can be undermined when States pick and choose what suits them at a particular moment - an à la carte approach rooted in political convenience, rather than principled commitment.

The inability of the Security Council to play a role in preventing the conflict in Iraq has led to speculation on the relevance of the United Nations in maintaining peace and security. So, should we concede to the thinking that United Nations has become irrelevant? In my view, the contrary is true. I think we can derive encouragement from the fact that the United Nations, and specifically the Security Council, was both the focus and forum of an intense and sustained debate over several months on how best to disarm Iraq.

The Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan himself observed at one occasion, that since his 40 years with the United Nations, he could not recall any issue dealt by the UN that had led to several Security Council meetings at the ministerial level, with so many capitals engaging so actively, and an issue that has also mobilized the public in large numbers around the entire world. Before a shot was fired, we witnessed millions of demonstrators taking to the streets. Furthermore, the palpable breadth and depth of disappointment in so many countries at the failure of the Security Council to find a collective solution to prevent armed conflict in Iraq, shows how much is expected of the United Nations. It reflects the conviction of people all over the world that the United Nations is the institution where decisions on matters of collective peace and security should be taken. It is my belief, therefore, that the United Nations family may come out of this difficult experience more relevant than ever.

I would like to reiterate that the existence of the United Nations system is to serve as a forum, a tool, a vehicle through which multilateral approaches can be initiated, developed and brought to fruition. In the last ten years or so, the world has been learning how to better address the challenges we face. Wars in Bosnia and Sierra Leone have been brought to an end. Timor-Leste is independent. The United Nations, civil society groups and private sector businesses are working more closely together than ever before, with each recognizing the need for partnership.

The United States plays a major role in the United Nations not only because of its being the host country and the largest single contributor, but also, and even more importantly, because of its conceptual input in designing the Organization. It was the US leadership that united the world in

its endeavour to maintain peace and security, to respect equal rights and promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

Without doubt, the UN is going through a critical phase. At the same time it is necessary to acknowledge that the UN is indeed collectively greater than the sum of its individual parts. It has no doubt achieved great successes and also had its share of failures. I am convinced that it is still the most appropriate instrument for ensuring that an enabling environment is created in places of conflict and suffering in which the people can shape their own future and determine their own destiny. I do hope that in this endeavour the UN will be so successful here in Timor-Leste that we will be able to present it as a model case, as an example to others.

British director Stanley Kubrick once observed that great states behave like gangsters and small nations behave like prostitutes. I believe that multilateralist approach with its emphasis on the need to respect the rules of international law on one hand and its support for the basic principles of cooperation and solidarity on the other can help to ensure that this realpolitik observation will in time become more and more obsolete. Or at least I can still entertain this hope.

It has been a pleasure to address you, as the youth of this country, in whose hands the future of this new nation – the latest member of United Nations – rests. Together with this, comes the responsibility of all of you and all of us of responsible global citizenship. I have no doubt that, even as a small nation, with its struggle and the principles and freedoms on which you are building your new state, the UN will profit from your engagement and wisdom.

I would like to wish you all a future free of fear of repression and free of fear of poverty. I would like to wish you all a success, prosperity and personal happiness.

Thank you for your attention.