

17 September 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Conclusion of the Sixty-First Session of the General Assembly**

Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

We have come to the end of the 61st session of the General Assembly. It has been an honour and a privilege to work closely with all of you.

I have presided over a change of leadership in the Secretariat and we have achieved notable successes in the General Assembly.

During this session we have worked with determination and consistency, in an open and transparent manner.

From my perspective, as the only woman President for a generation, and the first from the Arab world, I have come to see the United Nations as a global family – a family that is becoming ever more interdependent.

At times, like all families, some members can have differences of opinion. This is natural in such a large and diverse group.

We have many mutual interests, but it is only in the spirit of collective responsibility that we can take further steps to build greater trust and co-operation.

We do this best when we all join together in common cause.

Despite the suspicion and mistrust that can at times prevail, you have demonstrated repeatedly that you can rise above your national interests, in the service of the common good.

It is clear to me, without any doubt, that when we stand united we are stronger; when we pursue our common goals with purpose and determination, the General Assembly makes a real difference and achieves successes sought by the entire world.

To do this effectively we must all accept our shared responsibilities and differences to work together for change – for there is much work still to do.

The speed of change in the world around us is accelerating. Over the past year the world has witnessed many dramatic events – civil wars and human rights abuses continue and have escalated.

Darfur is an ongoing humanitarian crisis; the threat of terrorism continues; natural disasters have increased in frequency and scale. Climate change is no longer a matter of debate – it has become a living reality for many. And, we truly face a ‘development emergency’ if we are going to achieve the MDGs on time.

Unless we act decisively, the planet will, by 2015, be suffering not less, but more environmental degradation. Feeling forgotten with misplaced hope, millions of people will still be struggling on less than one dollar a day, and millions of children will still go hungry.

Yet we should not lose hope, for I believe that great hope arises from great hardships.

More importantly, this is a situation that we have the means at our disposal to address and overcome.

That is why I made the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals the overarching theme of this session.

Excellencies,

Each year the challenges that the multilateral system faces change – new priorities emerge. The UN has at times been slow to react and rise to the occasion. So that over the years the tools we have at our disposal to tackle pressing issues have become less effective. This gap continues to grow.

However, in this session of the General Assembly, we have added to the list of accomplishments and helped to close the ‘gap’.

Together we have strengthened the principal organs of the United Nations, enhanced cooperation among them, and with regional organizations.

The relationship between the General Assembly and the other principal organs must be founded on complementary – not competitiveness – as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations. We must therefore continue to develop these relationships in an open, transparent and cooperative manner to strengthen the Organization and better accomplish our common goals.

This year, I forged good relationships with the Presidents of the Security Council. On several occasions I was invited to address the Council during their debates. I trust this cooperation will continue in the coming sessions.

In this regard, I would like to call for the implementation of the many General Assembly resolutions aimed at promoting this type of transparency and cooperation, in particular 58/126, 58/136, and 59/313.

Going forward, we need to ensure the faithful implementation of these and other resolutions to further enhance partnership among these principal organs.

Excellencies,

General Assembly revitalization has been a priority this session. As well as adopting a new Resolution, we have renewed and broadened our engagement with Civil Society, NGOs and the private sector.

Another essential component necessary to strengthen the General Assembly is to enhance the leadership role of the President of the General Assembly. This role of the President is contingent, not only on his/her political and diplomatic skills, but it is also based on the support the Office of the President receives from the Secretariat of the United Nations. It is critical therefore to strengthen the Office in proportion to the growing responsibilities of the President.

The thematic debates I convened on development, achieving the MDGs and financing them, gender equality and women's empowerment, 'civilizations and the challenge for peace', and climate change have boosted our credibility and revitalized our thinking.

This has been the beginning of a renaissance for the General Assembly. And the practice of convening thematic debate on the international priorities of the day has been an essential part of revitalizing the General Assembly. I therefore would like to urge Member States to continue to support these initiatives politically and financially.

The Islamic Development Bank, the newest member of our family of Member States and Permanent Observers, set an excellent precedent when it announced in the General Assembly a ten billion dollar Fund for the implementation of MDGs.

We can all be proud of adopting the landmark Convention on Disabilities; the Convention on Enforced Disappearance; and, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

These are major steps forward towards protecting and promoting the human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, but also in reasserting the General Assembly's role as the chief deliberative and policy making organ of the United Nations.

By strengthening ECOSOC, I am confident the Council can more effectively promote global efforts to realize our international development goals. This is both a demanding responsibility and a tremendous opportunity that we must all support wholeheartedly.

You have all reaffirmed the need to reform the Security Council, since the status-quo is no longer acceptable.

During the next session, I hope the membership will, on the basis of the progress we made and on the positions and proposals of Member States, have the courage to begin discussions on meaningful intergovernmental negotiations.

In the 21st century, the world demands a more representative, legitimate and effective Security Council.

It also deserves a more coherent, effective and efficient United Nations system, that can deliver more for the forgotten poor - the most vulnerable who lack a voice.

The consultations on System-wide Coherence have made some progress. They have demonstrated that on substance we are less divided than on the process itself.

However, this impasse is not sustainable. We need to take concrete action – since any further delays will only prolong the suffering of the poorest on this planet. On gender equality, the opportunity is now squarely before you, and I hope the proper decisions will be taken.

On other issues, you have demonstrated your willingness to modernize this organization to face the challenges of the 21st Century, by;

- implementing comprehensive reforms to strengthen our role in peacekeeping and peacebuilding;
- finalizing consultations that have recommended concrete options to strengthen International Environmental Governance;
- launching and reviewing the implementation of the Counter Terrorism Action Plan;
- improving the effectiveness of the Peacebuilding Commission and raising new finance for the Peacebuilding Fund,. In this regard, I thank all Member States that have contributed to the Fund this year, and trust the membership will continue to raise additional resources in the coming sessions;
- giving the staff of this organization an effective system to settle disputes and administer justice; and strengthening its oversight by creating an Audit and Oversight Advisory Committee; and,
- by adopting a new scale of assessment and finalizing the capital master plan you have put this organization on the right path to the future.

We have also successfully prepared the ground for important events that will take place during the 62nd session including: the High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural

Understanding; the Special Commemorative Session on Children; and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development.

Excellencies,

In this complex and globalized world, there is a larger question that looms over the United Nations.

Are we satisfied that the decisions we take have an impact on the ground to ease the suffering of the many who are in dire need of our support?

In part, the answer is yes, but we need to do much more.

Of course, the UN is not a universal cure for the world's problems. However, on many issues, we have shown the road ahead. Still we have not silenced our critics.

However, we must remember that it is not they for whom we work to serve – it is the global public.

I can tell you first hand from my own experience on official visits this year that this organization continues, at times against all odds, to work for the common good – to help build a more democratic, prosperous and equal world.

These are indeed lofty goals, and alone we will not achieve them.

While the United Nations can guide the way and point out the futility of military confrontation, ultimately it is the responsibility of sovereign Member States to work out solutions to crises, particularly, those in the Middle East and in Darfur.

More than ever before, we need to focus on the underlying lack of dialogue between civilizations, cultures and nations that is at the core of many of today's problems.

As we, the General Assembly – the parliament of men and women - concluded during the thematic debate on civilizations, there is a lack of understanding, and mutual respect between different parts of the global community.

We must tackle these issues squarely and in doing so, we will have to move beyond the outdated mindset that separates the world into donors and recipients – North and South. We live in a new age, with new possibilities, and new global players from the South.

Showing the way forward, Gandhi once said that, 'We need to be the change we want to see in the world'.

Today, for the membership of the United Nations this means we must match our words with our deeds – our rhetoric with action.

The promises that Member States of the United Nations have made deserve to be kept.

Living up to our promises and achieving the MDGs by 2015 is one of the greatest gifts that we could give to humanity, and our future prosperity and stability.

We cannot allow our commitments to remain mere pledges, then only words that symbolize our broken promises.

Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

As we close this session, may I take this final opportunity, once again, to extend my sincerest appreciation to all the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly during the 61st session, and thank the Chairpersons and the Bureaus of the Main Committees for all their hard work.

I would like, in particular as well, to highlight the dedication of all those Ambassadors who have Chaired or facilitated important consultation processes. For without all of your dedicated and skilful work I would have nothing to report today.

I would also like to thank Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-Moon for his commitment to the principles and ideals of the United Nations, and for his support for the process of reforming this international organization over the past eight months during which I have enjoyed working with him. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Deputy Secretary-General Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro for supporting my work on MDGs, particularly on gender.

My gratitude is also directed to the Secretariat – in particular all the staff in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and our friends in GA Affairs. But also to the wider United Nations family.

I would also like to thank the many representatives of civil society and the NGO community, who are such great advocates for a strong United Nations and for international solidarity. My regular briefings with NGOs have always given me food for thought.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to express my long-lasting appreciation and sincere thanks to each member of my team. Over the year they have become my close family; and, a microcosm of the diversity of the United Nations.

I would like to commend you for your professionalism. Your dedication, literally day and night, to the work of the United Nations goes beyond the call of duty.

I also want to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to my successor as President, H.E. Dr. Srgjan Kerim.

Dr. Kerim is an accomplished academic, a captain of industry, and an experienced diplomat. He is also a great believer in the United Nations. I know that you will all extend to him the same cooperation and friendship I have been so privileged to enjoy.

Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Thank you for all you have done this year, in the interests of this organization and the people of the world.

The challenge you have now before you is to continue to carry the torch of multilateralism forward – to bring light where there is darkness, to bring hope where there is fear.

Each of us here today has a responsibility. We are all accountable. Only the passage of history will judge whether we have been successful.

I can pass on this gavel knowing that I have given my all to serve the values and principles of the United Nations. For this honour, privilege and opportunity I am deeply grateful to all of you.

Thank you and farewell.