

11 May 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,  
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,  
on “The Role of the United Nations in the Globalized World:  
Promoting a New Culture of International Relations”**

Ha-da-ra-tic-um, [distinguished guests]  
Sai-dati, sa-dati, [ladies, gentlemen]  
Al-salam wa-aleey-cum

Thank you very much Ambassador El Reedy for your kind words of welcome.

Any foreigner, who steps to the prestigious podium to address the Egyptian Council of Foreign Relations, feels humbled.

The historical evidence of Egypt's greatness are many, and everywhere visible. But so are the striking symbols of modernity such as the resurrected Bibliotheca Alexandrina and skyscrapers in Cairo.

The Egyptian scholar Gamal Hamdan has argued that Egypt's place in the Arab world is analogous to that of Cairo in Egypt: it is the cultural, economic, and political hub.

The country's central geographic location has allowed you engage and remain actively involved in diplomatic efforts across the region.

Egypt has always employed its national expertise in the service of multilateral cooperation, particularly when promoting African aspirations, and through its contribution to United Nations peacekeeping missions and peace-building efforts.

I would also like to commend the efforts of the Cairo Regional Centre for Training on Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa – with the support of the Government of Japan – to help African countries assume a more active role in dealing with conflict across the African continent.

As recent events in Lebanon and Gaza have demonstrated the Middle East continues to remain volatile.

As set out in its initial mandate the General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to support two-States - Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within recognised borders - as the most viable solution.

However, our mission has not yet been accomplished. After more than 60 years we still need a fully viable, secure and independent Palestinian state.

The violence needs to end, including by resolving other issues related to Lebanon, Syria and the Occupied Territories, to usher in a new era of peace based on freedom and security, justice, dignity and mutual respect - principles that are at the core of the United Nations purpose.

As a founding member of the United Nations, Egypt has a leading role to play to achieve this: in the spirit of the Camp David Accords.

However, aside from these regional tensions we also face global challenges like climate change and new emergencies such as the food crisis which have hit this area of the world hard and fast.

In order to strengthen peace and to overcome these challenges and emergencies stronger regional and international co-operation is vital.

Many of these challenges make it necessary for nations to share sovereignty.

The Arab League is in a process of self-reinvention. Not as a threat to individual state sovereignty, but as an “Arab United Nations”, fostering technical cooperation through specialized trade, education and agriculture agencies.

However, regional solutions in themselves are insufficient in the face of the types of global challenges we are confronted with. Regional actions must feed into a common effort through the web of existing international institutions, primarily the United Nations, and must be based on shared values and shared responsibilities.

This is where the role of diplomats is crucial.

Egypt has a long and proud history of diplomacy and numerous well recognized experts of international renown stature – including, of course, former United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whom I had the honour to work with.

But also during that time, as a Yugoslavian representative in the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77, I had the privilege to work with Hussain Hassouna and Amre Moussa.

Egyptian diplomacy has of course been very active in the work of the United Nations. And now I have the pleasure to work with Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz during the 62nd session of the General Assembly. He serves as one of my vice-Presidents. I am very grateful to him for also undertaking the crucial role as one of the facilitators preparing the ground for the Financing for Development review conference in Doha later this year.

This is a very important element of the United Nations broader developmental agenda – a central priority of the 62nd session of the General Assembly.

Reviewing the implementation and delivering fresh progress on Monterrey is critical to meeting our key developmental goals – be they the 2015 target of the MDGs, or, the short-term challenges of climate change and the global food crisis.

Even in Egypt - a middle income county with strong economic growth of 7 per cent, where car ownership has quadrupled in five years – the rising cost of basic food-stuffs is troubling.

Some have referred to the food crisis as the ‘silent Tsunami’; I prefer to call it the perfect storm.

Rising fuel costs have increased prices for fertilizers and pesticides, land and subsidies set aside for bio-fuels has taken food off the worlds table, and the growing demand for meat in Asia has diverted grain to livestock feed. Inflationary pressures have been unleashed even though there is enough food to go around.

Most worryingly some countries favour export restrictions as a short-term solution, which is only restricting supply and raising prices further.

There is another side however. The food crisis also offers a win-win opportunity for the international community to collectively agree to policies that promote trade efficiency while also boosting agricultural production and reducing the vulnerability of the poorest around the world.

As President, of the United Nations General Assembly I would support immediate action on the food crisis. I am encouraged to see that world leaders, among them President Mubarak, will attend the Rome FAO meeting.

I commend the Secretary-General for establish an interagency Task Force to address “the widespread hunger, malnutrition and social unrest” that soaring food prices have brought. But we need to go further to identify the scope, nature and the implications of the food crisis, followed by concrete measures for its resolution.

The world’s poorest live in farming areas; they need seeds, small scale irrigation, support and education to help turn their lives around. Economic and social security is the building block of sustainable development, national stability and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need resources, of course, but most of all I think we need new ideas, new approaches -- a new vision that is able to go beyond our ‘traditional mindset’.

I fully share what Ambassador El Reedy wrote in his message as Chairman of this Council, that:

“far-reaching changes that have impinged on the international scene have reshaped the world order and redefined power politics. In tandem, the world economic order has also been

transformed. Other factors have accelerated the change; among them are the rapid development of information technology and the emergence of the cultural element in international relations.”

As I recently argued in an op-ed in Al Hayat - taking this analysis to its logical conclusion - our globalized world has outgrown the rigid parameters of existing institutional frameworks.

If we want to tackle the truly global challenges, and also, take full advantage of the benefits of globalization we now need to think radically about institutional reform: about creating a new culture of international relations.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

When facing up to the challenges of their times after the ashes of the 2nd World War, world leaders of the day forged a new system of international relations for the 20th century. However, to face up to today’s emergencies and deal with tomorrow’s challenges we need to move beyond that historic vision and radically reshape the existing international architecture to adapt to the needs of the world of the 21st century.

A world that is - more than ever - best described as a true global village and characterized by interdependence. Relations run deep, creating vast and dense interdependent networks in all spheres and at all levels, down to the level of the individual. The speed with which these interactions happen is also unprecedented.

This fluid and flexible state of global relations allows unique possibilities for global partnerships that also seriously involve non-governmental actors.

But the system is also more vulnerable. Major challenges become global problems that need global attention. And our responses to single issues are themselves interconnected and have impacts on other concerns.

The nexus between climate change, the food crisis, rising energy prices and the growing use of land to produce bio-fuels is a prime example.

Traditional attributes of power are losing their significance. Speed is becoming more important than size. Soon the traditional balance of power politics must give way to a new understanding based on an equilibrium of shared interests.

We need to fundamentally change our mindset.

We need a new kind of internationalism that caters to a new kind of global society - based on principled pragmatism and shared responsibility: a new way of thinking about our shared fate and our shared responsibilities in a way that reflects the complexities of contemporary human and economic relations.

This new culture of international relations should not be super-imposed, but fluid and flexible to cope with our dynamic, changing world, and it should have the well-being of the individual and communities at its centre.

This is precisely why I use the word culture and not order. In the past sixty years people around the world have gradually become alienated by the notion of order.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are witnessing two major and interconnected shifts in world affairs – very much a product of globalization -- that offer the prospect of achieving a new approach to deal with international relations.

The first shift is the move away from a state-centered policy towards human centered approaches that emphasize the individual as the primary subject and agent of policy.

This shift is also characterized by the ‘disaggregation’ of national sovereignty. This was already well understood by former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali who on a number of occasions noted that the period of absolute sovereignty had ended.

The second major shift can be characterized as a gradual move from a stress and preoccupation on rights to the accentuation and acceptance of responsibilities that go along with these rights. This is true for the State as much as for the individual, but also, for all other actors in the international arena.

These two trends are interdependent. Through them we see the space for the emergence of a new culture of international relations.

So you may ask “what is role of the United Nations?”

Globalization certainly raises the potential advantage of the United Nations. It is still the only organization with a near universal membership and a wide international agenda.

Globalization has also enabled the emergence of capable and willing individuals, civil society groups, think tanks, global corporations and religious institutions that have a key role in shaping various aspects of the international policy making process.

If harnessed correctly non-state actors can play an instrumental role in addressing contemporary global challenges from climate change, and growing international inequalities, to terrorism, sustainable development and global financial turbulence.

Though states are no longer the sole actors in the international arena, they continue to set the rules of the game, at the national, regional and international levels.

This is precisely why the United Nations remains relevant and important. It is through the United Nations that global rules and norms of interaction are harmonized and coordinated -- rules and norms that also govern the way non-state actors behave in the international arena.

At the same time, it is the unique convening power of the United Nations that allows for a multitude of stakeholder to be actively involved in this norm setting process and also to be part of a global partnership to develop solutions to the international problems we face.

In devising the priority issues of the current session of the General Assembly we have focused our attention on the pressing challenges that can only be addressed together; by the full membership of the Organization; by encouraging member states and UN system to work closely together; and, by encouraging the active involvement of major non-state stakeholders such as civil society, academia and the private sector.

Our main priorities reflect the central role of development in the United Nations: responding to climate change, achieving the MDGs, advancing on Financing for Development and promoting the implementation of the global counter-terrorism strategy.

These key areas of work are supplemented by our continued drive to make progress on various aspects of UN management reform.

However, the legitimacy and relevance of the United Nations depends above all on its ability to translate agreed rules and commitments into practical actions – whether resolutions of the Security Council, for example, in the form of practical action in Darfur; or, in the General Assembly on key development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals.

We need a more active and coherent United Nations system and stronger engagement from all members of the General Assembly.

We can begin by encouraging all Member States of the United Nations to live up to their responsibilities; by emphasizing the interdependence of all nations; by recognizing that crucial issues on the Assembly's agenda are not about numbers, but about people; and, by involving a multitude of external actors in the Assembly's work: to not only assert their rights, but also to be willing to engage in efforts to make the exercise of those rights sustainable and universal.

This is what the new culture of international relations is all about.

I believe the United Nations can provide the framework for this new culture. But I am also convinced that it can and should be the catalyst for it too. But to achieve this we need a fundamental renewal and radical rethinking of what we expect from the United Nations, the Bretton Woods Institutions, as well as, from other international and regional bodies.

This is the real challenge for our immediate future.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Within the United Nations the most often heralded institutional reform relates to the Security Council, even though this is but only one aspect of the ongoing reforms that are necessary to transform the organization.

As the Chairman of the Task Force working on this issue I believe we have a realistic chance to make progress. Member States by now – after over a decade of discussions know quite well the various positions – and all have been put on the table.

There is agreement that discussions should move to the level of intergovernmental negotiations. There is also general agreement to tackle the issue through an ‘intermediary approach’ – on a set of initial changes that would then be reviewed in 10-15 years. This would allow us to gain practical experience, as well as, for states not to be forced to give up their views.

The leaders of two P5 countries, Prime Minister Brown and President Sarkozy, have both publicly stated their support for this approach. In my recent meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan he also agreed with me that the ‘intermediary approach’ was the most viable option that would produce results considering current circumstances.

We should not pass up this opportunity to move beyond the inertia of the last 15 years.

Member States of the General Assembly are currently discussing a set of negotiables on the basis of seven principles that I proposed in December.. This should, hopefully lead to a compromise text that would then be taken up in an intergovernmental format.

Looking to the longterm however, I’m convinced that if Security Council reform is only about adding or subtracting countries, rather than about modifying our approach with new ways of dealing with global challenges and international emergencies, then we will become trapped in an outdated institutional framework that day by day becomes more of a status-quo.

Changing the composition of the Security Council must not be an end in itself, however necessary it is as a first step. Reform of the Security Council must be part of embedding a new culture of international relations and more adequate regional representation.

The result must be a Council whose members are ready to share responsibility, willing and able to act to protect human life - as the body of last resort - whatever and wherever the threat may be.

Security Council reform, as well as, the wider reform of the United Nations system, and indeed all our attempts at international institutional reforms, must rest on the fundamental aim of creating more flexible, dynamic forums capable of acting on the basis of equilibrium of interests.

This way we can avoid falling back onto an outdated and inefficient – zero sum - balance of power and mutual security based on deterrence.

Excellencies,

World politics is certainly still also about war and peace and revolves around the exercise of power. But what is changing, is the increasing opportunities we all have to make a difference. We now have more of a chance to become the subjects, the shapers of our own fate, of the fate of world politics, if you wish, rather than be subject to and objects of complex international relationship that confer power.

International actors like the United Nations as well as governments, but also other actors, such as eminent think tanks like this Council have the obligation to advocate for and facilitate these opportunities. And, I believe that I have friends and allies here among leading Egyptian diplomats.

Thank you very much for your attention.