

18 September 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the 67th Session of the General Assembly**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Respected Vice-Presidents,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor to address you at the opening of the 67th Session of the General Assembly.

I come from a proud, democratic country I have been greatly privileged to serve in two successive terms as foreign minister.

During that time, I addressed this chamber on several occasions. Today, however, I do so for the first time as President.

As I stand before this greatest of parliaments, I pledge to faithfully serve the cause of the United Nations, and to exercise my authority in a forthright and even-handed manner—with the utmost respect for the sovereign equality of the Member States.

At the onset of my remarks, allow me to express my deep appreciation for my predecessor, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser. I thank him and his Office for their tireless efforts in moving the General Assembly's agenda forward, greatly increasing the visibility of this institution.

I would also like to take this opportunity to voice my sincere gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his unfaltering commitment to this Organization's values and principles.

Since taking office, he has presented a robust and visionary program, while continuing to demonstrate strong leadership in dealing with the many complex issues that humanity faces.

The two of us have so far had a strong and productive relationship, and I look forward to working even more closely with him throughout this session in my new capacity.

In addition, I would like to underline the importance I attach to strengthening cooperation with the UN's other principal organs, including the Security Council, as well as the various UN Entities and Specialized Agencies.

Like my predecessors, I will work with civil society representatives. With notable exceptions, however, we have not yet found an efficient way to draw upon the tremendous capacities of the world's public policy institutes and think tanks. As President, I intend to launch a number of initiatives to harness their wisdom and experience.

My main responsibility, however, will be towards the Member States. I look forward to engaging with all delegations, in furtherance of shared goals and objectives. I particularly count on my Vice-Presidents, including through the work of the General Committee.

Excellencies,

The General Assembly lies at the heart of the United Nations. It is the only forum where all Member States come together as sovereign equals to advance the aims of the UN Charter.

Its preamble states that this Organization was established “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which [...] has brought untold sorrow to mankind.”

The maintenance of international peace and security was enshrined by our founders as the first stated purpose of the United Nations, in order to make it possible for human beings to live in greater prosperity, under a reign of peace founded on justice and universal respect for international law.

Their vision must remain at the core of the Organization.

Excellencies,

“We meet here amidst upheavals of unprecedented scope”—these were the words used by one of the most influential statesmen of our time, spoken a few months ago to describe this period of our history. The resulting high level of geopolitical volatility will probably remain with us for quite some time. This will surely make it much more complicated to carry out our duties.

However much it may be wished, the United Nations is not in a position to solve all of the world's problems overnight. Yet for all its imperfections—which are, after all, inherent in any institution shaped by the human mind—I am strongly convinced that this Organization remains critical to addressing the growing needs of mankind. One simply cannot imagine a world in which peace and the dignity of all could flourish without the United Nations.

Having consulted widely on the matter, I have chosen bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means as the overarching theme for our work over the next twelve months.

It provides continuity with the work of previous sessions, and builds on the priorities of the Secretary-General. I hope this framework will usefully serve the noble cause of preventing gathering conflicts and resolving existing ones.

Excellencies,

Peace and security is a prerequisite for the stability needed for global economic growth, sustainable development, and social progress.

As President, I will work with the Member States on bringing us closer to meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

In addition, we must focus on the post-2015 agenda. Our objective should be the full implementation of the mandate this body received at the Rio+20 Conference. This will require a decisive commitment to observe not only procedural deadlines, but also the political and financial objectives it has been designed to accomplish.

This includes launching the process of identifying and, ultimately, implementing, the Sustainable Development Goals, putting the evolving sustainable development framework in the service of conflict prevention. I believe this not only complements, but can decisively reinforce, all other efforts to strengthen international peace and security.

As President, I will also work with the Member States so that the General Assembly can help improve global economic governance.

Each in its own way, the G8, the G20, the IMF, the World Bank and others play critical roles. However, I strongly believe that the ‘chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations’ ought to contribute more to the ongoing discourse about how to shape the material destiny of our planet.

Accordingly, I intend to convene an informal, high-level meeting on this issue. Its aim would be to establish, in the next few years, an effective consultation framework between the General Assembly and international financial and trade institutions, as well as groupings such as the G20.

Excellencies,

The General Assembly should endeavor to make progress in the field of arms control and disarmament.

As President, I will support efforts towards the achievement of a successful outcome to the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. I hope to engage with Member States on how present impasses in this critical area can be overcome, including those revolving around the Conference on Disarmament. I will also encourage the Member States to sustain efforts on achieving the early entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

I will also urge the Assembly to strengthen the role of UN peacekeeping. I would like to engage with the membership on how we can more decisively support those who serve under the UN flag in conflict-ridden areas throughout the world.

The presence of the United Nations on the ground is an indispensable instrument of peace. For many decades, it has greatly contributed to reducing hostilities between belligerents, while helping create an atmosphere more conducive to the settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

Contemporary UN peacekeeping is both complex and continually evolving. I would like to recognize the growing role the African Union—in partnership with the United Nations—is playing in conflict prevention, management and resolution across the African continent.

Other regional actors, such as the European Union, are also increasing their participation in UN-led Missions. As President, I will encourage the expansion of such initiatives.

When a settlement is reached anywhere in the world, I believe the General Assembly, coming together in consensus, can act as a moral guarantor of what has been agreed.

Excellencies,

The fight against terrorism must also remain high on our agenda. On this issue, one of the most important instruments at our disposal remains the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. I also wish to underscore my view that efforts should be increased to finalize a draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism, in accordance with resolution 66/105.

By working more closely together, we will send a clear message to those who finance, plan and engage in terror that history is not on their side. We must never yield to them. All available resources to help eliminate this global scourge need to be marshaled. Come what may, terrorism will be defeated.

Excellencies,

Sixty-four years ago, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which solemnly linked respect for the inalienable rights of individuals with advancing the cause of peace and security.

I strongly believe the UN should continue to play a leading role in promoting and protecting human rights in the international arena. The General Assembly, together with the Human Rights Council, ought to devote greater attention to realizing what the Universal Declaration called a “common standard of achievement.” Highlighting urgent human rights situations is important work. In my view, this goal can be more readily advanced through a collaborative approach, not a confrontational one.

During this session, the effort to strengthen and enhance the effective functioning of the Human Rights Treaty Body System should continue.

I would also like to emphasize my steadfast commitment to ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women. As President, I will consult with the Member States on how the General Assembly and UN Women can work more closely together.

One issue of great concern remains combating violence against women. Another is the trafficking of women and girls—a heinous form of modern-day slavery. It is one of the fastest growing criminal industries, rivaling the trafficking in illicit drugs and arms. During this session, the Assembly will be presented with an important appraisal of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which we adopted in 2010. I will work with the Member States to ensure appropriate follow-up actions take place, so we can help bring this appalling crime to an end.

Excellencies,

On the final day of the 66th Session, the General Assembly adopted its latest resolution on revitalization. As President, I will work with the Member States—and with the Ad Hoc Working Group in particular—on identifying further ways to enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of this body, with a particular focus on implementing what has already been agreed.

To revitalize this most universal of multilateral institutions is to renew our faith not only in the UN's programs and purposes, but also in each other.

The Member States can count on me to assist and facilitate in advancing the revitalization agenda, including the Security Council reform process.

Excellencies,

Close to eight hundred years after the Magna Carta was promulgated, many people around the world still do not enjoy the fundamental rights enshrined in that seminal document—rights that protect individuals, while enabling countries to develop in peace and security, as sovereign equals.

That is why I believe the Rule of Law should remain high on the agenda of the 67th Session.

I urge the Member States to agree on a consensus document by the start of the High-Level Debate on the Rule of Law in a few days' time. As President, I will work closely with the General Assembly on implementing any mandate that may result from the meeting.

I will also seek to harness our efforts in tackling other important issues, including the promotion of indigenous peoples' rights, and that of persons with disabilities.

Excellencies,

Ivo Andric, our Nobel Literature Prize laureate, once wrote, "I am not afraid of human beings, but of what is inhuman in them."

Assuaging this fear, by consciously seeking to tame our most primeval impulses, has been a critical task of legislators and statesmen for millennia. Such reasoning has informed the drafting of every just law, great constitution and lasting treaty. It also stands at the foundation of our Charter, a document which aims first and foremost to obviate the recourse to war.

It is my sincere hope that our deliberations, properly conducted, will serve to reinforce the proposition that the United Nations is indispensable to the conduct of international relations.

The challenges we will face over the next year will likely be great in number.

As we begin the 67th Session, let us never lose sight of our shared obligation to participate in the responsible stewardship of the purposes and principles of this Organization, and remain dedicated to resolve our differences harmoniously through dialogue, not discordantly through confrontation.

Let the tempered conduct of the best of those who came before us serve as a worthy signpost along our way. This can help enrich our perspective, and in so doing strengthen the cause of establishing true and lasting peace in the world.

In coming to the end of this address, I would like to single out one such individual.

Amongst all the leaders and statesmen ever to walk through the doors of the United Nations, few have been quite like Dag Hammarskjöld—whose life came to an abrupt end exactly fifty one years ago today.

As we reflect on what lies ahead during the 67th session, we could draw inspiration from what he wrote down not long before his death: “Never measure the height of a mountain until you have reached the top. Then you will see how low it was.” [...] “Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step; only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find the right road. And,” Hammarskjöld concluded, “never ‘for the sake of peace and quiet,’ deny your own experience and convictions.”

Thank you for your attention.