

1 October 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the General Debate of the Sixty-Seventh Session
of the United Nations General Assembly**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Heads of Delegations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come to the end of the General Debate of the 67th General Assembly. I would like to thank all the distinguished speakers for the important contributions they made.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly for their assistance and cooperation. I am grateful to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for its support and understanding.

It was my honor to welcome a number of new leaders to the General Assembly for the first time, and to hear them express their countries' positions and aspirations.

The fact that this session heard the views of more than 100 Heads of State or Government and over 70 Deputy Prime Ministers or Ministers, is a clear indication that the United Nations remains, in the words of the Charter, a "center for harmonizing the actions of nations."

Excellencies,

The overarching theme I chose for this year's General Debate was bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means. Over the past week, we have heard thoughtful and constructive interventions on this critical topic. This catalyzed fruitful discourse in the plenary and at numerous side events, in turn stimulating many bilateral discussions.

Some speakers offered concrete proposals on how the mechanisms that are in place can be better utilized. This included calls to increase support for UN peacekeeping efforts. A number of interventions recognized the growing role that the African Union, the EU, and other regional organizations are playing in UN Missions. Many delegations introduced concepts or ideas to be incorporated into the overall efforts to revitalize the General Assembly.

Numerous addresses emphasized the fact that deep-seated structural causes often form the backdrop of the immediate political symptoms of disputes. They called for a more comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and resolution, which would encompass in a truly holistic way both short-term and long-term measures.

A great many delegations congratulated the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan for having reached agreements on security issues, border demarcation, and the normalization of economic relations, and urged them to resolve the outstanding issues.

Excellencies,

We heard serious concerns expressed from the rostrum about the world's increasing geostrategic volatility and unpredictability. A great number of delegations emphasized the fundamental importance of respecting the basic tenets of international law, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States. Strong emphasis was placed on the principle of the sovereign equality of Member States as being the backbone of effective multilateralism.

Speaker after speaker reiterated their positions that establishing respect for the rule of law is essential to achieving lasting peace in the aftermath of conflicts. This would engender the more effective protection of human rights, and create the conditions leading to economic progress and development.

The General Debate brought about a congruence of views on the fact that conflict prevention, durable peace and security, and sustainable development can only be achieved through an integrated approach. Many delegations addressed the consequences of the world's economic crisis, linking them not only to the necessity of increasing poverty reduction campaigns, but also fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. The emerging consensus is that efforts must be intensified in order to fulfill the MDGs over the next three years.

A great many speakers stressed the need to begin the swift implementation of the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference, underlining the critical role this session of the General Assembly has to play in moving the process forward. This includes putting forth a list of Sustainable Development Goals, and proposing options on an effective financing strategy.

Improving various aspects of global economic governance was also one of the most widely addressed topics. The enhancement of South-South cooperation was strongly emphasized. In addition, the speeches of many delegations reinforced the view that the General Assembly should play a more prominent role in discussions on this issue, underlining the importance of holding meetings in the plenary before and after important G20 events. Concerns were also raised about inclusivity, accountability, and transparency.

Excellencies,

The Palestinian statehood issue was raised by numerous delegations. There was resounding support for a two-state solution that would take into account the legitimate concerns of Israelis and Palestinians,

including viability and security. Many speakers called for a resumption of negotiations that would lead to a comprehensive solution, underlining the importance for the international community to strengthen support for the peace process. Some called for the United Nations to play a more decisive role in this endeavor.

Many Member States stressed the importance of supporting the democratic changes in a number of Arab countries. They also expressed deep concern with the deteriorating security and human rights situation in Syria. There was resounding encouragement for the ongoing efforts of Joint Arab League-UN Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi.

Considerable attention was also paid to the various aspects of the nuclear issue and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. A number of delegations stressed the legitimate right to peaceful use of nuclear technology by all Member States, while others emphasized adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and IAEA mandated safeguards as overriding concerns. In that context, we heard forceful messages that the very survival of nations may be at stake.

Speakers also responded to what the Secretary-General called the “perfect storm of vulnerability” that is now sweeping across the Sahel. We heard their disquiet over the growing threat that terrorism, attempts at unilateral secession, and trans-border organized crime pose to regional stability and development efforts.

Terrorism in all its forms was strongly condemned. So were recent blasphemous insults to religious figures and beliefs—but also the ensuing violence, including the murder of the U.S. ambassador to Libya a few weeks ago.

In opening the General Debate, I highlighted the enhanced role I would like the UN Alliance of Civilizations to play in conflict prevention. The importance of strengthening dialogue and understanding between cultures and faiths was a recurrent theme in the speeches. The substandard state of religious freedom in parts of the world was also highlighted as a growing concern.

Member States expressed cautious optimism that Somalia was moving in a positive direction, after so many failed starts. There were calls for the United Nations to redouble its efforts to secure peace in that country, as well as in other parts of that continent, including the Great Lakes region.

Moreover, considerable attention was devoted to Africa’s development needs, stressing the imperative to keep this topic high on the agenda of the General Assembly.

Many delegations raised human trafficking and the illicit trade in small arms as issues of particular concern. Climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and other environmental challenges were also discussed.

Excellencies,

Speaker after speaker underlined the importance of ongoing UN revitalization efforts, including Security Council reform. Emphasis was placed on improving working methods, with several delegations stressing the need for greater transparency and cooperation with other bodies in the UN System as critical issues.

A number of delegations presented their views on improving the Human Rights Treaty Body system. Speakers also underscored the importance of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women.

Other important matters were also raised, such as the promotion of indigenous peoples' rights, and that of persons with disabilities.

Excellencies,

When I opened this Debate on September 25th, I called on the Member States to have faith in our ability to come together in the full understanding of our common destiny, so that this Assembly would go down in history as an Assembly of peace.

In reviewing the many statements that have been made, I have been struck by how much common ground exists on a wide range of issues. Obviously, significant differences of opinion remain to be overcome. Nevertheless, I believe there is room for optimism.

World leaders have given us the strategic guidance on how to move forward in the implementation of the agenda of the 67th Session. In the time ahead, I intend to continue consultations with Member States, the Main Committees, and regional as well as informal Groups, on the proposed program of work.

Let me underscore that, as has been the case since its founding, this Organization will only be as strong as the membership chooses to make it.

Let us now dedicate ourselves to the hard work ahead, which begins in earnest as early as tomorrow.

Let us try to be more transparent and efficient in how we conduct our affairs, making the best use of our time and resources to advance common objectives.

Let us engage with a readiness to compromise and try hard to strengthen trust in each other and in so doing, help to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the 193 Member States of the United Nations.

Thank you for your attention.