

United Nations Nations Unies

THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

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Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly, at the UN Day Concert

Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Guests,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the General Assembly, allow me to welcome you to this very special event.

This chamber is in many ways the beating heart of the United Nations, the only place where all Member States come together as equals to advance the global cause of peace, development and human rights.

Tonight, on United Nations Day, we shall witness a great musical celebration by Stevie Wonder and Friends.

Stevie Wonder is recognized across the globe not just for his amazing music.

He is also a great humanitarian, social activist and philanthropist a man of global conscience, a true UN Messenger of Peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Whether we're at a concert or using our earphones, we develop a singular relationship with the artist and the music we are listening to. Music is what feelings sound like, and feelings are always deeply personal and unique.

Great music cuts across every boundary. It's a universal language: an expression of humanity through sound an art form that touches us all irrespective of where we come from, or the language we speak.

I grew up in a great country that is tragically no more Yugoslavia. It was still the era of vinyl, when people would rifle through albums at the record store and admire the cover artwork. They weren't very cheap back then, so you chose your purchase with care. It was exciting to get the album home, and to place it on the turntable to hear the rich sound of analog.

One of the first records I ever bought was Stevie Wonder's *Songs in the Key of Life*. It did not bother me that this was about ten years after it was first released; it was enough just to own a Stevie Wonder recording one that I had heard so much about from my older cousins.

Recently, I listened to the album for the first time in many years. It struck me that a line from one of the songs perfectly encapsulates in just seven words the founding vision of the United Nations. "This world was made for all men," Stevie Wonder sang.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Calling for peace and understanding is a recurring theme in the music of Stevie Wonder. Time and again, the message we hear is that to work for peace, one must begin from oneself. To build a more just world, we ourselves must be more just. To build a more tolerant community, we ourselves must become more tolerant.

One cannot ask of another to make sacrifices for peace, if one is not ready to do the same oneself.

That is why peace cannot be the result of fear or imposition. It is not the desolation of the graveyards of enemies, or the eerie quiet that follows violent repression. In other words, peace is not merely the absence of war.

True peace also requires reconciliation which is itself based on forgiveness, repentance, and contrition.

One needs to be willing to forsake vengeance, and to start afresh.

Such convictions permeate the lyrics found in many of Stevie Wonder's most sophisticated songs during a time when it was often easier to sing about defiance and retribution.

"We will not build a peaceful world by following a negative path," Martin Luther King said back in 1964. In the same address, he spoke of the need to "see that peace represents a sweeter music, a cosmic melody that is far superior to the discords of war."

There can be no better message on the 67th anniversary of the UN Charter coming into force, when nations first committed themselves to "sav[ing] succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and "practice[ing] tolerance and liv[ing] together in peace with one another."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this United Nations Day, it is my hope that through the universal language of music, we may better understand the universal message of peace.

As a teenager in Belgrade, sitting on the floor of my bedroom listening to the music of Stevie Wonder and other great artists, I would never have dreamt of being part of a celebration like this.

I am sure that we will have a very special evening here.

Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to Stevie Wonder, and all the friends he will be performing with tonight, for offering us this unforgettable experience.

Thank you very much for your attention.