

12 September 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,  
President of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of  
U.S. President John F. Kennedy's Last Address  
to the United Nations General Assembly**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the General Assembly, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations.

We are marking the fiftieth anniversary of U.S. President John F. Kennedy's final address to the UN, delivered two months before his assassination in Dallas, Texas.

At the onset of my remarks, allow me to thank his friends, admirers and family who are joining us today, and to acknowledge Relativity Media for helping to sponsor this afternoon's activities.

Last but not least, let me express my sincere appreciation to Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University for his leading role in bringing us together for this event. I truly enjoyed reading his newly-published book on JFK, which gives a detailed account of President Kennedy's last great foreign policy initiative: to establish more peaceful relations with the Soviet Union, and pull the world away from the nuclear precipice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the time of his election in November 1959, the Cold War had dominated the global landscape for close to two decades. By the start of 1963, suspicion between the superpowers had risen to an all-time high. The Berlin Wall had been erected; the divisions in Europe seemed permanent; nations struggled to rid themselves of the colonialist yoke; and the Cuban Missile Crisis had brought the world to the brink of a thermo-nuclear war, producing what the historian Arthur Schlesinger called the "most dangerous moment of human history."

It was a pivotal point for both Kennedy and Khrushchev, who both emerged from this terrifying crisis as changed men.

Together, they envisioned a new strategy of peacemaking—one that was defined succinctly by JFK from the rostrum of the General Assembly on September 20th, 1963: "the winning of peace [does not]

consist only of dramatic victories,” he said. “Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures.”

Over the summer of 1963, they took an unprecedented first step, concluding the landmark Treaty of Moscow that prohibited nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere, outer space, and under water. History has recorded it as the start of a series of confidence-building measures that led to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, the era of détente, and ultimately, the end of the Cold War.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The fundamental challenge faced by Kennedy’s generation was overcoming the threat posed by nuclear Armageddon. The one we face is no less threatening to our survival.

Like theirs, our challenge is universal.

And like them, we must strive to “improve the condition of man,” and put to an end “chronic disputes which divert precious resources from the needs of the people[...], drain[ing] the energies of [all] sides, [and] serv[ing] the interests of no one.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The destruction that looms ever-present in our time is of an altogether different kind than the one Kennedy faced, however. If it should come, it will not be at the push of a button by one man, but through the inaction of all mankind.

Today, we are not threatened by an acute missile crisis, but by the runaway menace of growing economic instability, rising social inequality, and spiraling environmental degradation.

Every nation is being increasingly affected by this grave threat, and none can hope to overcome it on its own.

It is genuinely global in scope, and truly formidable in its complexity.

World leaders have given the General Assembly the task of devising a way forward that comprehensively integrates the three dimensions of development—namely economic, social, and environmental—into a single, fully coherent sustainable whole.

They have understood that for all its imperfections, the UN is the only institution we have that can credibly establish the parameters of a universal transition to sustainability. According to the terms of the Conference on Sustainable Development that took place more than a year ago in Rio de Janeiro, we now have 900 days left to formulate and adopt the Sustainable Development Goals; design options for financing them; and establish workable arrangements for monitoring their implementation.

I would like to believe that historians will look back on Rio as our pivotal point, and that like JFK before us, we shall have the courage to see further ahead, aim higher than in the past, and aspire for more than taking a step or two away from the precipice.

With “hope, confidence, and imagination,” it is now our turn to “move the world” in anew direction.

As we embark on this journey, we may draw inspiration from the lessons of statecraft Kennedy bequeathed to posterity, and, in the words of Emerson, “not go where the path may lead, [but] go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail [behind, for others to keep on].”

We are now faced with a great endeavor that will test the limits of our endurance, and determine whether we shall have the resolve to engage in a process that, when completed, will fundamentally transform the way in which humanity conducts its affairs, seeking to overcome the destructive circumstances we have created over many decades, that if left unchanged, will lead inescapably to everyone’s ruin.

Let JFK’s great legacy stand as a reminder that the “problems of human destiny are not beyond the reach of human beings.”

Thank you for your attention.