

16 September 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the General Assembly's Sixty-seventh Session**

**Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. President-elect,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It has been a distinct privilege to preside over the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly. I was truly humbled by the opportunity to serve the world on behalf of my nation.

Seven decades after we became a founding member of this Organization in the wake of the great victory over fascism, and twenty years after having been left out of this chamber as our country descended into a maelstrom of ferocious civil war, we stood with pride on the world stage once again—empowered by the confidence bestowed upon us by the Member States.

I have made every effort to carry out the duties of the office to the best of my ability, to exercise my authority in a forthright and even-handed manner, and to faithfully serve the cause of the United Nations.

One of its finest accounts was given by H.E. Oswaldo Aranha of Brazil on his final day as President of the 2nd Session of the General Assembly, in the autumn of 1947. His words are as inspiring now as on the day he spoke them. The UN, he said, “stands for a new order based on peaceful accord, on understanding, on free discussion, on free decision, and on the common and equal responsibility of peoples. It is the organ of world public opinion,” he concluded.

Excellencies,

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me carry out the agenda of the 67th Session. First and foremost, the distinguished representatives of the 193 countries that make up this chamber—in particular those who served on the General Committee, the Vice-Presidents and the Main Committee chairs, as well as facilitators I appointed over the course of this year.

I also thank all those who work in various branches of the Secretariat for their support and assistance—especially the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as well as the interpreters, protocol officers, and security personnel.

My multinational team was anchored by a group of devoted Serbian advisers, who worked in tandem with highly capable diplomats seconded by their capitals. Allow me to acknowledge their industry and diligence, and to thank them for their invaluable contributions.

Last but certainly not least, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for his treasured advice and guidance throughout my term. It has been an honor to work with him over the past twelve months, and I take this opportunity to pay a wholehearted tribute to his spirited leadership of the United Nations.

Excellencies,

During this session, Member States adopted close to 90 written and oral decisions, and around 300 resolutions.

One of the most significant related to the text of the breakthrough Arms Trade Treaty: the first legally-binding instrument ever negotiated at the United Nations to establish common standards for the international transfer of conventional armaments.

This robust and actionable document will enhance transparency in the weapons industry; oblige sellers to provide an assessment as to whether their commercial activity could facilitate human rights abuses and violations of humanitarian law; and strengthen reporting and accountability mechanisms.

I respectfully urge the Member States that have not yet signed or ratified the ATT to do so at the earliest opportunity, so as to expedite its entry into force.

Excellencies,

On the 65th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 181 mandating two states for two peoples in the Holy Land, I was greatly privileged to preside over a historic meeting of the General Assembly, in which Member States overwhelmingly voted to grant Palestine Non-member Observer State Status to the United Nations.

It has helped set the stage for direct negotiations between the parties in the aftermath.

I take this opportunity to urge all stakeholders to the peace process to join together in common cause, and so close an era of great enmity in the Middle East.

The horrors of the past inevitably shape who we are, but unless we are ready to tame and eventually overcome them, the future is not likely to be any different.

I believe the talks that are now underway represent the best chance in a generation to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement, enabling two proud nations to start living side by side in peace and security, at long last.

Excellencies,

Another notable achievement of the 67th Session was the landmark resolution on the UN and global economic governance.

Member States for the first time set the baseline terms of flexible and regular interaction in the General Assembly between the UN, G20 and non-G20 countries, as well as International Financial Organizations.

Henceforth, this chamber will serve as an inclusive platform to exchange views, share information, and reflect on common concerns on financial and trade issues.

This would complement existing multilateral efforts to establish what a recent report by the Secretary-General called a “more inclusive and more participatory system of global economic governance.”

Excellencies,

The great Irish man of letters, George Bernard Shaw, once wrote that the “people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they don’t find them, make them.”

In order to create such circumstances—that would raise the vitality of the General Assembly—a decade ago Member States extended a mandate to the PGA to propose topics for thematic debates on “issues of critical importance.”

During the resumed part of the 67th Session, I convened more than a dozen such events. Each provided us with a unique opportunity to exchange views, as sovereign equals, on key subjects affecting the international community as a whole.

I am proud of the fact that a record number of countries participated in them—empowered to speak up and present their cases, and listen to frank and open responses.

Together, we broke a number of taboos—and made sure there would be no more forbidden topics in the General Assembly. I believe it will help this universal parliament assume a more pronounced role in the governance of world affairs.

In addition to those mandated by specific resolutions, thematic debates were held on international criminal justice, the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa, sustainable development and climate change, culture, entrepreneurship, education, social inequality, and most recently, credit rating agencies.

Some of them were groundbreaking events that featured not only high-level participation by Member States, but gave the world’s highest podium to leading international opinion-makers, religious leaders, artists, academics, athletes, and NGOs.

Excellencies,

The most glaring failure of the international family during the 67th Session has been the ongoing tragedy of Syria.

I feel deeply ashamed that we have not been able to find a way to stop the carnage.

In that proud and ancient land, the death toll continues to rise with every passing hour, as does the number of refugees and IDPs. The nation's social fabric is breaking down. Schools have been shut and hospitals operate without medicine. Continued militarization deepens the suffering of Syria's people, and strengthens those who seek to establish ethnic or sectarian fiefdoms.

To end the fratricide, we've got to have high-level political dialogue. We need to bring the parties together, and make them talk to each other face to face.

To that end, I believe we must push even harder for the International Peace Conference on Syria to be convened, and wholeheartedly support all initiatives that can prevent exacerbation of the catastrophe.

Excellencies,

Syria is but the latest fissure to appear in the international system. In recent times, both the quantity and frequency of flashpoints has been surging upward. Our problems have gotten more complex, and led to an increase in the overall sense of uncertainty about the future.

Humanity is facing a test of unprecedented proportions—an existential crisis unlike any the world has experienced in its long and tumultuous history.

We are in the midst of a period of great consequence, characterized by growing economic instability, rising social inequality, and spiraling environmental degradation.

Our energy and agricultural demands are soaring; access to clean water is plummeting; sovereign debts mounting; populations exploding; youth unemployment is rising; the polar icecaps are melting, and droughts have become commonplace.

All nations are increasingly affected, and none can hope to solve these challenges on their own.

Excellencies,

It is against this backdrop that world leaders came together in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro to set the foundation of the post-2015 agenda. They agreed to comprehensively integrate the three dimensions of development—namely economic, social, and environmental—into a single, fully coherent sustainable whole. And they endowed the General Assembly with additional mandates.

Over the course of the 67th Session, we took the essential first steps to fulfill them.

We set up the Open Working Group to formulate and adopt the Sustainable Development Goals; we agreed on the terms to govern the work of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts to propose options for financing them; and we achieved consensus on a framework for launching the High Level Political Forum to create arrangements for monitoring their implementation.

I am very proud of these achievements, for they have established the necessary groundwork upon which substantive issues can now be addressed.

The General Assembly has less than 850 days to do so.

I believe there is still a lack of understanding of the enormity of this task in certain quarters. It is probably the most challenging endeavor in the history of multilateral diplomacy.

All eyes are now turned to this chamber for leadership. It must answer the call of the anxious mankind.

This is the only international institution endowed with indisputable legitimacy to act on behalf of all sovereign states. If it fails to establish the parameters of a universal transition to sustainability, we will not move forward. Across the globe, economies would slump, social tensions would rise, and adverse climate change would gallop ahead with abandon. We would lurch uncontrollably into a downward spiral, from which we may never recover.

Excellencies,

This is the moment to shake off complacency and throw aside old habits that reinforce the status quo.

It is the moment to reinvent the very definition of human progress—to transform what not so long ago was but a far-off dream, into a reality for all of mankind.

And it is the very last moment to chart a course towards a more secure, prosperous and sustainable future.

There will be no second chance—no ‘next time,’ no ‘do over.’ We must not squander this opportunity—out of fear, reticence, distrust, incredulity, or whatever else may be holding us back.

As we embark on this fateful journey, we should draw inspiration from what the great Dag Hammarskjöld wrote down not long before his death: “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 never ‘for the sake of peace and quiet,’ deny your own experience and convictions.”

God bless you, Ladies and Gentlemen, and thank you for your attention.