



# IRELAND

**Statement by Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D.,**

**Minister for Foreign Affairs**

**at the**

**61st Session of the General Assembly**

**United Nations, New York,  
26 September 2006**

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## **61<sup>st</sup> Session of United Nations General Assembly**

**Address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Dermot Ahern, T.D.**

**Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

Madam President,

Let me begin by congratulating you on your appointment and assuring you of Ireland's full support for the coming year.

### **UN Reform**

This session of the General Assembly is the last under the stewardship of Secretary General Annan. I salute his achievements and pay tribute to his leadership. He has carried out his heavy responsibilities with wisdom and dignity. He can step down from office fully satisfied with the service he has given to the peoples of the United Nations.

I was proud last year to act as one of his envoys in the vital reform agenda that he pioneered.

Since the 2005 World Summit, significant progress has been made. The Peace-Building Commission and the Human Rights Council have been established.

But there is more to be done. Management reform is essential to revitalising our Organisation and ensuring that the Secretariat can focus on the priorities we all share. It is in all our interests – developed and developing countries alike - for it to succeed.

The continuing stalemate over the reform of the Security Council leaves it insufficiently representative of the world as it now is. That serves those who for their own reasons would challenge its legitimacy. This situation cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely, so I welcome recent efforts to restart negotiations on possible options likely to win widespread support.

### **Three Global Challenges**

Madam President,

The true test of the United Nations is, however, not the efficiency of its structures but the effectiveness of its actions.

As the Secretary General said last week, three key challenges face the world:

- Achieving sustainable development and the elimination of poverty and disease.
- The promotion of universal human rights and the rule of law
- Ensuring security, the prevention of conflict and the ending of war.

### **Development**

In setting our own national target of meeting the goal of 0.7% of GNI by 2012, three years ahead of the European Union schedule, Ireland has put the Millennium Development Goals at the heart of our aid programme, with a special focus on Africa, poverty reduction, tackling hunger and HIV/AIDS. Last week we published a White Paper which sets out clearly and in detail how we aim to achieve our development objectives.

Sustainable development must include addressing the immense global threat of climate change. And development is also key to addressing the enormous challenges posed by migration.

### **Commitment to Africa**

Ireland is deeply committed to Africa. Despite its huge problems there are signs of hope.

We are inspired by the efforts to shape new institutions and more cohesive societies in the aftermath of conflicts and cruelties in Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Ireland is honoured to assist these and other countries through their difficult transitions, including through aid and the presence of our troops in the UN mission in Liberia. We particularly support the efforts of the African Union to bring peace and prosperity to Africa, helping to place Africans firmly in control of their own destiny.

### **Darfur**

However, not all of our collective efforts have met with success.

The suffering of the people of Darfur shames the world. There has been human tragedy on a massive scale, with the intimidation, rape and murder of hundreds of thousands of innocents, and the displacement of vast numbers from their homes.

I have visited a displacement camp myself. I have seen the precariousness of the lives of the people there, but also their determination to return home to a better future for themselves and their children.

The people of Darfur have three essential needs.

First, humanitarian aid must be delivered safely and without restrictions.

Secondly, there must be an international peace-keeping force with a robust mandate. As set out by the Security Council, it should be a well-equipped and substantial UN force. I again appeal strongly to the Sudanese Government to agree to the deployment of such a force, and to all those with influence on it to persuade it to do so. I simply cannot emphasise enough the urgency of this.

Pending the arrival of a UN force the African Union force, whose continuation I welcome, should have the resources necessary to play a more effective role.

Thirdly, long-term security can only be guaranteed by the full implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement.

Last year the World Summit defined the international community's responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, should national authorities fail to do so. It would be a disgrace if this major advance became an exercise in empty rhetoric.

The Government of Sudan has fundamental responsibility for the safety of its own people. The international community must find ways to persuade it to live up to that responsibility, if need be including further measures against it. We cannot indefinitely stand by and watch with horror from the sidelines.

### **Human Rights**

There can be no lasting development or security without full respect for human rights. The human rights of the most vulnerable are especially important.

I strongly welcome the recent conclusion of negotiations on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Human Rights Council must, in developing its new ways of working, build on the achievements of its predecessor. It must demonstrate that it can provide strong leadership, particularly in dealing effectively with grave human rights abuses.

### **Burma / Myanmar**

The human rights situation in Burma / Myanmar remains particularly grave. I again call on the régime to move towards democracy and to release all political prisoners, in particular Aung San Suu Kyi.

### **Peace and Security**

The centrality of the United Nations to international peace and security is once again underlined by the issues dominating the debate in this Assembly. The question is not whether the UN is relevant, but rather whether it can respond effectively to all the situations which clamour for its attention. The Peace Building Commission adds an important new dimension. It must be properly resourced and Ireland is pleased to be contributing €10million to the Fund.

### **Middle East**

The single greatest challenge to international peace and security is the situation in the Middle East.

The dreadful events of recent months have again brought before the eyes of the world the continuing suffering being borne by the peoples of the region.

Frustration at the long agony of the Palestinian people creates and sharpens wider divisions across the world. A comprehensive settlement to the inter-

related problems of the region is more urgently required than at any time in the past 60 years.

In Lebanon, there are signs of hope, but there is no room for complacency. Resolution 1701 offers a path to a stable peace, and good progress is being made in its implementation. European countries in particular have responded well to the call for contributions to UNIFIL II. Ireland will shortly be in a position to offer its own contribution to that force.

But the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians will continue to generate surges of conflict across the region until it is resolved. Any illusion that there can be a unilateral or a military solution has surely been shattered. This is a conflict about the sharing of space. The only solution lies in a negotiated outcome. It is time for a major new international effort to launch serious negotiations for a settlement - the establishment of two sovereign democratic States living together in peace and security.

But to achieve peace, there must be partners for peace. Ireland strongly supports the continuing efforts of President Abbas to create a national unity government committed to the peace process and reflecting the Quartet principles. If he succeeds, the international community must be generous and creative in response. Israel's absolute right to exist in peace and security should be unchallenged. But, not least in its own interests, Israel must engage seriously and openly with the Palestinians. It must cease all activities – in particular the expansion of settlements – which are against international law and which make a lasting peace harder to attain.

### **Disarmament**

Ireland shares the Secretary General's continuing outrage at the failure of last year's summit to make any reference to nuclear disarmament. It is simply folly

to let this vital issue languish. In the next NPT Review, we must do better. Ireland will work with like-minded partners to keep this issue on the agenda. Dr Hans Blix has recently offered us a range of fresh and practical ideas from which to draw.

The world is right to insist on nuclear non-proliferation. But progress on disarmament would make that insistence still more compelling. Ireland, with its European partners, wants to see a diplomatic solution to the issue of Iran's nuclear programme and we call on Iran to respond positively and rapidly to the wide-ranging proposals which have been put to it. We equally support efforts to renew the Six-party Talks on North Korea.

The world must also act to reduce the supply of small arms and light weapons that facilitate the escalation of local tensions into all-out conflicts. Ireland strongly supports the negotiation of an Arms Trade Treaty. The disturbing reports from Lebanon also highlight the need for further restrictions on the use of cluster bombs.

### **Northern Ireland**

Madam President,

On behalf of my government I would like to pay tribute to Prime Minister Blair for his commitment and dedication to the peace process in Northern Ireland. He and my Prime Minister, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, have devoted almost ten years to driving it forward.

Credit is also due to the parties in Northern Ireland who, despite deep and abiding divisions reaching far back into our history, are committed to address those divisions purely within the political arena.



In Northern Ireland, the word has finally replaced the weapon as the way to resolve disputes.

The Northern Ireland peace process is now at an important juncture. We have worked hard to implement the 1998 Good Friday Agreement but its capstone, a sustained power sharing government, has for far too long proved elusive.

The British and Irish Governments are demanding that the political parties there agree by 24 November to form such a government. That deadline is real, reflecting our shared belief that drift and uncertainty on the political front are not in the interests of peace and reconciliation and cannot be sustained.

If the parties fail to agree, both Governments will deepen our cooperation to deliver improvements in people's daily lives.

But that by far is not our preferred option. We want local politicians in Northern Ireland taking responsibility for the issues that most concern their people.

The conditions for a power-sharing Government have never been more favourable. It is what people want. Inevitably, it will happen some time. But if it does not happen in November, the opportunity may not come again for a considerable time.

### **Ireland's Support for Conflict Resolution**

Madam President,

The great Irish writer George Bernard Shaw once said that making war was hard but that making peace was infinitely more arduous.

Peace building and conflict prevention are ultimately about psychology: addressing fears, perceptions, beliefs about the past and about the future. A conflict does not begin when the trigger is pulled. It begins in the heart and mind of the person who pulls the trigger. We have learned this at first hand in Ireland.

We know the pain and difficulty of dealing with the legacy of division.

But over the years we have learned some things about building peace, encouraging reconciliation, improving human rights and the rule of law and addressing social and economic alienation.

Our own national experience reinforces what we have learned at the United Nations and from our development programme. That is why we have just established an Irish Conflict Analysis and Resolution Support Unit. It will seek to harness our experience and help to share it. It will work closely with the Peace Building Commission.

We do not overestimate what we can do or underestimate the difficulty of peace building. But I genuinely believe that our track record means that we can bring something distinctive to the table.

I would encourage all countries here to find ways of sharing their own experiences and enhancing our collective knowledge of how to prevent and resolve conflict.

## **Conclusion**

Madam President,

Since the establishment of the United Nations, the world has been spared a repeat of the catastrophic global conflicts that made the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the bloodiest era in human history.

But the challenges remain grave and pressing.

When we met here last year, we agreed an ambitious agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have made some progress since then. But there is still so much to do. We must focus now on making our ambitions real.