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Débat général

**Discours
de
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General Debate

**Statement by
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Unofficial translation

Over the past year, we have celebrated the 50th anniversary of the death of Albert Einstein, the originator of the Theory of Relativity. He recommended the construction of the atomic bomb to President Roosevelt, yet always described himself a 'militant pacifist'. He shared his qualms of conscience with Sigmund Freud. In the course of their correspondence entitled "Why War?", they came to the conclusion that in order to achieve the peaceful coexistence of mankind on this planet, the world needed an organisation uniting all nations with which people could identify. The empathy towards that organisation could provide it with the authority to counter war. It was with this conviction that many Swiss citizens voted in favour of Switzerland's accession to the UN five years ago.

We are glad to have taken this step.

Switzerland may not have experienced war within its own borders for a number of centuries. But war is not only there where bombs detonate and tear people apart. When war is raging somewhere in the world, it affects us all. We can overcome that feeling of powerlessness in the face of violent conflict by joining together to work towards peace. For a country such as Switzerland, the UN is the most important means of pursuing this vision. The UN embodies our hopes of justice and solidarity.

Only through a common alliance of all nations do we have this opportunity. No country is capable of solving today's global challenges alone. War, terrorism, drug trafficking, the offshoring of jobs or environmental and climate-related disasters are all global threats. They know no borders, not even those of powerful nations. No State is the master of its own fate, not even a strong State. The strongest is not most powerful alone. Only through an inclusive network with universally applicable norms can might be replaced by justice. The UN has been the world's most successful effort to achieve this.

Every nation, every community, gathers its own cultural and political experiences in dealing with conflicts. And they organise themselves accordingly. In our case, this led to the basic values of democracy, the rule of law and social equilibrium. This influences our view of how the international community could address conflicts worldwide:

- By helping the victims of violence or disaster.
- By establishing a **legal** system and enforcing it.
- By examining the deeper causes of violence and seeking to redress them.

1. Solidarity, victim support, humanitarian assistance

The first reaction of a human being towards a victim is to help that person.

The UN has stood by victims of disasters with humanitarian assistance, be it after a tsunami, during war or drought. In so doing, it has succeeded in building up positive empathy and in strengthening trust in it worldwide.

Should the UN fail in its humanitarian task, however, desperation and the tendency towards violence increase and intensify conflicts. This can be witnessed with brutal clarity in the Middle East or in Darfur.

2. Establishment of a legal system, standing by it and enforcing it -

Establishment of a legal system

Just as a State strives to establish a legal system and implement it, so we too want to develop and implement certain norms in the community of States. There are the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), human rights, the Climate Protocol and there is international law.

In many States a system of criminal law has developed in which criminals are prosecuted by the State, brought before an independent court and have their sentence enforced. In this way amends is made to the victims, thereby preventing revenge and a never-ending spiral of further violence. At the same time it serves as a deterrent to potential criminals.

The international community also has the same obligation with regard to war criminals. The international community has to fight terrorism. However, in selecting the means to achieve that aim, namely the rule of law, it must not renounce those principles. Torture is the most radical form of its negation and renders it bereft of its legitimacy. And the Geneva Conventions are no hindrance to fighting terrorism, in fact quite the contrary. If the appropriate instruments are lacking, then new ones can be created such as the conventions on terrorism. But this struggle can only be credible if human rights are respected in its pursuit.

- Enforcing the legal system

The fact that we today have an international court capable of applying international criminal law is an historic achievement. War criminals are extradited and their guilt determined through trial. This can sometimes take a long time, as the case of Liberia shows, and it can last too long, as the extradition of war criminals from the Balkans shows. However, this must occur so that all – in the Darfur conflict, for example – understand the consequences of their actions.

In order to enforce a legal system, all countries, including the large ones, should adopt the Statute on the International Criminal Court. For international law is not only of fundamental importance to small countries not capable of defending themselves from attack on their own. Large States or 'superpowers' must also have an interest in this for the benefit of their own credibility.

- Forging an irrevocable bond to the legal system

We all know that no State can function purely through laws and ordinances. A majority of its people has to be behind it and what it stands for. The same is true of the UN.

That is why in the Human Rights Council we are increasingly searching for solutions through a dialogue of partnership and less through pointing the finger and making threats. However, it is not something that can be achieved overnight. The fact that we speak of a 'Peace Building Commission', reveals that peace cannot be brought about or enforced by UN peacekeepers alone. There need to be blueprints, assessments and a long term, differentiated commitment on the part of the international community in order to prevent conflicts.

Critics who labelled the UN as irrelevant due to the often cumbersome reform process have been set right. The creation of a 'Peace Building Commission' and the Human Rights Council show that the UN takes values such as the protection of human rights seriously and is able to develop new forms of peace building.

Just as a democracy strives to involve all of its citizens in political decisions regardless of their background and financial standing, there can be no dictation of terms on the part of individual countries or small groups. There needs to be a broader empathy, which is why we would like to see the UN Security Council reformed and enlarged. This would in turn reinforce its legitimacy.

Given that that is still a long way off, we must in the meantime undertake pragmatic improvements to the Council's working methods, in terms of veto rights for example.

3. Uncovering the causes of social conflict and tackling the root of the problem

Just as a State may seek the underlying causes of all threats and troubles and endeavour to overcome them, so this task is one that presents itself globally for the international community.

- Environmental disasters give rise to mass migration and to millions of refugees. The Kyoto Protocol is intended to address this threat at its root. If the UN can combine its strengths in the field of the environment, agree on effective measures and ensure that they are respected, then the fight against climate change still has a chance. Here too, it is crucial that all countries recognise the aims of the Protocol and take the appropriate measures. It is never too late: Even though the hole in the ozone layer has not yet shrunk, despite the ban on CFCs, the trend has begun to be reversed.
- Access to clean water is increasingly becoming grounds for conflict. Today a third of the world's population already suffers from water stress. At the Stockholm Water Conference, highly alarming findings were presented. How we go about using the ever more scarce resource of water is decisive for stability in the world.
- The cause of every military conflict and every terrorist attack can ultimately also be traced back to economic inequalities. They are the source of all tensions on our earth. That is why we must do our utmost to fight poverty, economic despair and political apathy. Religious conflicts too have economic inequalities at their root. The main divide and at the same time the main cause of all agitations is that between north and south. If we want religious tolerance, we must find a way of bringing about economic justice. The world defined its aims for poverty reduction until 2015 in the Millennium

Development Goals. We must make sure that we enable the UN and ourselves to keep that promise.

The conflict in the Middle East, the stabilisation of Iraq and the resolution of the (atomic) crisis with Iran can be addressed through dialogue. All parties should avoid inflaming these conflicts. Just as central as dialogue is respect for the basic principles of the UN Charter. As such, no State may deny the right of another to exist. Aspirations to the right of self-determination must not be disappointed if they are based on a valid legal order.

We have no other choice than to take a stand against a clash of cultures through a dialogue of cultures and religions. Humiliation and a lack of respect between cultures also serve as breeding grounds for terrorism. In no way do we want to wipe away the differences between civilisations. The world thrives on these differences and its diversity is what makes it so worthwhile and appealing. Equally important though is that we recognise the dignity of each culture and what we have in common. As a global forum, the UN makes a vital contribution in that respect. I look forward to the report of the High Level Group on the Alliance of Civilisations. Switzerland will be glad to actively participate in its implementation.

Neutrality

Switzerland is a neutral country. We have always understood this neutrality to be an obligation to work towards peace and not as legitimacy for ambivalence or standing on the sidelines. We have never wanted to remain neutral towards victims of violence and oppression. And there is no (such thing as) neutrality when it comes to the rules of the international community and international law. International law is the only legitimate alliance partner of a neutral country. The idea of neutrality is to not support hegemony and to champion the peaceful, equitable coexistence of all the countries of this world. That is Switzerland's understanding of neutrality and how it intends to exercise it here in the UN.

Thanks to the UN and to Kofi Annan

In the course of the correspondence "Why war?", Albert Einstein came to the conclusion that establishing empathy in institutional communities could be a means to prevent war. But how do you set about establishing empathy towards an institution? It develops through people who, in word and deed, stand up for these institutions and keep alive hope for justice and peace and encourage them to work towards those goals.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has given the UN just such a face. Through his commitment to the goals of the UN, to the reforms and to the fight against poverty he exemplifies political responsibility and human compassion. And at times he does so under the most difficult conditions - during the Iraq war for example, when the credibility of the UN as a whole was put in question. For that we are all deeply indebted to him. Switzerland particularly so, as he involved himself personally in domestic campaigns for our country's membership of the UN.

We are glad to have taken this step.