



General Assembly

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Official Records

General Assembly

Sixty-third session

5th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 23 September 2008, 9 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

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Agenda item 8

General debate

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour for me to address this gathering at the opening of the general debate of this sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

The international situation at this time is far from satisfactory. In fact, the world is in even more serious trouble than it was 63 years ago when the United Nations was founded. Right now we are witnessing a confluence of large-scale, interrelated crises.

But crises do not necessarily turn into tragedies. We are living in a time of tremendous opportunities to introduce corrective measures in order to improve our way of doing things, of interacting with one another and with Mother Earth and the natural world in general.

If we are to seize the opportunities that these crises now offer, we must move beyond laments, speech-making and statements of good intentions and take concrete action based on a firm resolve to replace the individualism and selfishness of the dominant culture and replace it with human solidarity as the golden rule that guides our behaviour.

Our Organization has done many laudable things which, had the United Nations not existed, would surely not have been achieved. However, if we look at the Organization's progress in fulfilling the primary purposes for which it was founded, we must admit that in terms of eliminating war, achieving disarmament and ensuring international security, we have failed.

In signing the Charter of the United Nations, all of us undertook to uphold certain principles which, if they had truly been upheld by all Member States, would have placed the world in a much better position today to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The world — our world — is ailing, and its illness is the one that Tolstoy described more than 100 years ago as the “mania of selfishness”. Some say that this is irreversible — that it is too late to do anything about it. I think this attitude is one of dangerous defeatism that will only paralyse us and guarantee that we keep sinking, until we drown in the morass of maniacal, suicidal selfishness in which we find ourselves.

More than half the world's people languish in hunger and poverty while at the same time more and more money is spent on weapons, wars, luxuries and totally superfluous and unnecessary things. We must resist the temptation to bury our heads in the sand in an attempt to deny reality. Let us be brave enough to acknowledge the vast inequities that exist in the world and within most of our countries, even in many of the most developed countries. These inequities are time bombs that will not simply go away if we ignore them.

In addition to the problem of hunger, poverty and high food prices, there are many other problems whose human origin can no longer be doubted. These include climate change, efforts to privatize water and the squandering of water as though it were an inexhaustible resource, the arms build-up, terrorism, human trafficking, the Palestine situation, problems related to humanitarian aid, gender inequality and children in especially difficult circumstances such as armed conflict or humanitarian disaster.

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Address by Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the United States of America.

Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr.

George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bush: ...

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We must stand united in our support of other young democracies, from the people of Lebanon struggling to maintain their hard-won independence to the people of the Palestinian territories, who deserve a free and peaceful State of their own. ...

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Address by Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the French Republic.

Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sarkozy (*spoke in French*): ...

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Europe says to Israel that it is its friend and that it will let no one threaten its existence. Europe says to Israel that it will always be at its side in the fight against terrorism, but with the same sincerity says to telling Israel that there will be no peace until there is a viable Palestinian State with recognized borders.

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Address by Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Liberia.

Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Johnson-Sirleaf: ...

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Beyond Africa, my Government believes, with great interest, that a durable solution can be found to the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflict. Late last year, I had the opportunity to visit and hold talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders alike in Tel Aviv and Ramallah. I gathered from conversations and reports regarding other sustained efforts in search of peace that the solution of two States, with secure and recognizable borders and mutual recognition of each other, is the way forward. We must never give up working for a formal end to the conflict and for a durable peace for all in the region.

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Address by Mr. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Turkey.

Mr. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Gül: ...

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It is also well past time to settle the conflicts of the Middle East, at the core of which lies the Palestinian question. Turkey actively supports all endeavours to bring about a lasting solution to that central problem and alleviate the plight of the Palestinian people. Turkey is also making every effort to help advance the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. One recent example is the indirect peace talks that Syria and Israel started under Turkey's auspices this past May in Istanbul.

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Address by Mr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): ...

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Secondly, we should remain seized of the Palestinian question until the two-State solution — the State of Israel and a State of Palestine living together side by side and in harmony — is attained.

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Mr. Divungi Di Ndinge (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): ...

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Specifically with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we can never emphasize enough that only concerted and thorough efforts based on the principle of two States — Israel and Palestine — living in peace and security within secure and internationally recognized borders will make it possible to bring about a lasting, just and equitable solution to that conflict.

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The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.

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