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OPENING ANNUAL DEBATE AMID 'TIME OF TURMOIL, TRANSITION', SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS

ON WORLD LEADERS TO OVERCOME DIVISIONS, DO MORE TO ADDRESS SOBERING CHALLENGES

General Assembly President Says UN Can Be as Strong as Members Choose to Make It: Urges Delegations to Find Courage, Tenacity of Purpose to Master Challenges Ahead

"I am here to sound the alarm," United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, urging political leaders gathered for the General Assembly's annual debate to overcome divisions and wilful blindness before it was too late to effectively address such global challenges as widespread insecurity, deepening inequality, government waste, and the impacts of climate change.

"This is a time of turmoil, transition and transformation — a time when time itself is not on our side", Secretary-General Ban said, opening the general debate of the Assembly's sixty-seventh session with a sobering snapshot of a world where people were struggling to cope with numerous hardships — from economic inequality to intolerance and fallout from conflict in places such as Syria and Mali. They needed ideas, leadership and results "now, not in the distant future", he said.

In such circumstances, the people of the world were looking to the United Nations to be more than a "mirror reflecting back a divided world", he continued, recalling the five-point action agenda he had out in January for imperatives such as sustainable development, prevention, building a more secure world, helping countries in transition and empowering women and youth.

He welcomed important progress on some fronts, noting that extreme poverty had been cut in half since the year 2000; democratic transitions were under way in the Arab world, Myanmar and many other countries; Africa's economic growth had become the fastest in the world; and Asia and Latin America were making important advances. "Still, we must raise our levels of ambition. We need more from each and every one of you. And the world needs more from our United Nations," he declared.

Turning to peace and security matters, he said the crisis in the Sahel was not getting sufficient attention and support. Poverty, fragility, drought and sectarian tensions were threats to stability across the region. "The international community needs a major concerted effort to address this alarming situation", he said, announcing that tomorrow he planned to outline the Organization's integrated strategy, with regional Governments and organizations expected to fill in the details in the coming weeks.

As for Syria, he said that situation was growing worse every day, and the crisis was no longer limited to just that country; it was a "regional calamity" with global ramifications. "This is a serious and growing threat to international peace and security which requires Security Council action", he said, calling on the international community, including the Council and especially countries in the region, "to solidly and concretely" support the efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi. "We must stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides and set in motion a Syrian-led transition as soon as possible."

On the wider Middle East, he noted that "a disgraceful act of great insensitivity" had led to "justifiable offense and unjustifiable violence" and he emphasized that, while freedom of speech and assembly were fundamental, neither was a licence to incite or commit violence. "Yet we live in a world where, too often, divisions are exploited for short-term political gain. Too many people are tolerant of intolerance. The moderate majority should not be a silent majority. It must empower itself, and say to bigots and extremists alike: 'you do not speak for us', he said.

The Secretary-General concluded his wide-ranging address with a challenge for the gathered officials: "You, the world's leaders hold in your hands the power of State, the levers of Government. Your people expect you to listen to their aspirations and to unleash their energies and ideas." The world expected political leaders to work with each other for the common good. While no one could do everything, every individual, in their own way, could do something. Together, if everyone upheld their responsibilities, today's tests could be met, opportunities could be grasped, and new life could be given to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, he declared.

In remarks that echoed the Secretary-General's calls for joint action and political will to tackle global challenges, Assembly President Vuk Jeremić (Serbia) said that rarely had it been more necessary for the world to draw closer together. Making progress would require Member States to turn once more to the first principles of the Charter. "In so doing, we will be able to give renewed meaning to the original intent of our founders", who had understood that when nations felt secure, they were much more likely to unclench their fists and give the process of peacefully settling disputes a genuine chance to succeed.

He said that the Charter enjoined parties to any dispute, to first of all seek a solution by, among other ways, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and judicial settlement. It was with that in mind that he had proposed "bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means", as the theme of this year's general debate. "I invite you to share your thoughts on the peaceful resolution of disputes — a fundamental task of the United Nations," he added.

Outlining his priorities, he said that what was agreed at the "Rio+20" summit on sustainable development would need to be implemented by the Assembly, including preparations to launch a high-level forum by the beginning of the next session. The Assembly had also been mandated to establish a working group to propose a list of Sustainable Development Goals for consideration and adoption by the plenary. He would, meanwhile, work to outline proposals for financing those objectives. Looking ahead, he said, more emphasis must be placed on economic growth, job creation, and the production of green goods and services in a more equitable trading environment.

In sum, he said the United Nations would be as strong as Member States chose to make it. Citing Ralph Waldo Emerson, he said: "an institution is the lengthened shadow of man". From the ancients to our own times, generations had endeavoured to advance the noble cause of peaceful dispute settlement. The culmination of those efforts was the Charter, "our surest guide in this time of consequence". He urged delegates to find a tenacity of purpose and the courage to master the challenges ahead, and saying if they worked with faith and common purpose, the Assembly could go down in history as an "Assembly of peace".

Delivering an address that drew on the events surrounding the killing in Benghazi of Christopher Stevens, the United States Ambassador to Libya, President Barack Obama denounced the "crude and disgusting" video that prompted protests in Libya — and throughout the Muslim world — and had sparked the attack that had killed the envoy. Yet, such hateful commentary was allowed by the freedom of speech clause in his country's Constitution. The United States recognized that not all countries believed in the right to free speech. But, in today's world, the notion that the flow of information could be controlled was obsolete. The question was how to respond to hateful speech. "There is no speech that justifies mindless violence," he said.

He also underscored that the various attacks of the past two weeks were not just an assault on the United States, but on the very ideals upon which the United Nations was founded: the notion that people could resolve their differences peacefully and that diplomacy could take the place of war. "If we are serious about upholding these ideals, it will not be enough to put more guards outside of an embassy [...] we must speak honestly about the deeper causes of the crisis," he stressed. "Today we must affirm that our future will be determined by people like Chris Stevens, and not by his killers," he said.

Touching on other topical situations, he said that as the Assembly met, the United States would again declare "that the regime of Syrian President Assad must come to an end so that the suffering of the Syrian people can stop and a new dawn can begin". The United States would not seek to dictate the outcomes of transitions abroad, he continued. But, it was the responsibility of all leaders to speak out forcefully against violence. Hatred of America, the West or of Israel could not be a political rallying cry, and it could not deliver on the promise of freedom.

In the Middle East, the road was hard, but the destination was clear: an independent, prosperous Palestine and a secure Israel. Understanding that such a peace must come through a just agreement between the parties, the United States could walk alongside all those that were willing to make that journey. He went on to say that Iran had still not yet demonstrated that its nuclear programme was peaceful. While there was still time and space to do so, he stressed that "that time is not unlimited". A coalition of Governments was holding Iran accountable, and the United States would "do what it must" to prevent it from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

On many issues, the world now faced a choice between “the promise of the future and the prisons of the past”, “and we cannot afford to get it wrong”. Instead, he said, “we must seize this moment”. The future must not be shaped by those who bullied women, but by girls who went to school. It must not belong to the corrupt few who steal resources, but by students and business owners. It must not belong to the vision of those who slandered religions or who denied the Holocaust. It was time to heed to words of Mohandas Gandhi, who had said, “intolerance is itself a form of violence”. People must work towards a world that was strengthened by their differences, not defined by them.

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Amir of Qatar, said that the Arab world was currently weathering a period that was “difficult and risky” and at the same time offered the prospects of hope. The unprecedented Arab experience was proving vastly different from previous transitions that had occurred elsewhere, and even if from afar the conditions seemed troubling or “filled with flames and smoke”, he assured delegations that what they were hearing and seeing was in fact a region that was, at last, taking matters into its own hands after having suffered years of dictatorship, dependence and corruption.

Recalling that the United States political and social experience had risen from the ashes of civil war, and that Europe had gone through terrible world wars before achieving a degree of unity that could not be attained by arms or hegemony, he said that the events in the Arab region were “natural and historic”. He hoped that delegations gathered for the general debate would sympathize with the historical transformations under way in the Arab world. That would reassure peoples who were marching with determination towards “a place fit for them in history” with the hope of a better tomorrow for future generations.

Finally, while expressing strong support for freedom of expression, he reiterated his belief that such liberties should not be used as tools to hurt or insult others. To that end, he urged a balance between the respect for sacred faiths and religions and the freedom of expression, so that stereotypes would be rejected and tolerance would trump intolerance. He called on the United Nations and concerned parties to start the process of elaborating “laws, procedures and controls to prevent insulting religions and faiths under any pretext, and, at the same time, keep the rights of man to know and express his opinion”.

Echoing several speakers throughout the day on the primacy of the rule of law, the Charter and organizational reform, Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa, said the United Nations faced immense pressure to address the unprecedented loss of life in Africa and the Middle East. It was concerning when the Organization appeared unable to act or assist — paralysed in certain instances due to inaction on the part of some Member States, and when a divided Security Council was unable to muster the collective courage to say “no more” to warring parties in the interest of peace. That illustrated the need to continue and deepen United Nations reform to make the world body agile and nimble in addressing contemporary challenges, he said.

Calling for more meaningful representation of Africa in the Security Council, he noted that issues affecting the continent accounted for 70 per cent of its agenda. It must be expanded in both membership categories, with at least two permanent seats and five non-permanent ones for Africa. Moreover, in order to ensure that disputes were settled peacefully, the Council should carry out its Charter-mandated duties within the confines of international law. Indeed, principles such as the “responsibility to protect” must not be used to justify regime change. Debate on such concepts must continue, so that norms and standards of accountability could be developed, he said, emphasizing also that the United Nations must maintain its impartiality and not be “dragged into” taking sides in a conflict under the guise of civilian protection.

President Sprent Arumogo Dabwido of Nauru said that, with unfulfilled promises stretching back decades, multilateralism had degraded into a scramble for finite resources and a fight for a bigger piece of the economic pie, all sugar-coated with empty rhetoric. International agreements contained reaffirmation after reiteration of non-binding commitments to live up to lofty ideas. Perhaps their greatest value was as a reminder of how little had been achieved, he said. “Our words must have meaning if our multilateral institutions are to remain effective in addressing our emerging global challenges,” emphasized. That dynamic could not be more evident than in climate-change negotiations, he said, recalling the terrifying news that Arctic Sea ice had dropped to its lowest level in recorded history.

Rather than increasing the urgency of the response, there had instead been efforts to delay action until 2020. States must realize that the atmosphere was so polluted that many dangerous climate-change impacts were unavoidable, he continued, urging the United Nations to address the related security implications. Indeed, climate change would become a bigger driver of conflict in the future unless steps were taken to prepare, he warned. While scepticism about the Security Council’s involvement in climate-change discussions was understandable, the time had come to remedy the issue, he said, adding that reform must provide a forum for addressing the security challenges of all countries, not just the most powerful.

Also speaking today were the Heads of State and Government of Brazil, Serbia, Benin, Finland, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Indonesia, Georgia, Dominican Republic, France, Lithuania, Honduras, Namibia, Rwanda, Switzerland, Argentina, Senegal, Panama, Jordan, Hungary, Pakistan, El Salvador, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Slovakia, Nigeria, Marshall Islands, Czech Republic, Afghanistan, Spain and Timor-Leste.

The Vice-President of Uganda also spoke.

Background

The General Assembly this morning opened the general debate of its sixty-seventh session, hearing the Secretary-General's report on the state of the Organization's work.

Opening Remarks

Opening the general debate, United Nations Secretary-General BAN KI-MOON said that delegations gathered every year at this time to look soberly and without illusion at the state of the world. "This year, I am here to sound the alarm about our direction as a human family. We can all see widespread insecurity and injustice, inequality and intolerance," he said, pointing to Governments that were wasting vast and precious funds on deadly weapons while reducing investments in people. Further, the severe and growing impacts of climate change were "right there before our eyes", yet too many people in power seemed wilfully blind to the threat.

"This is a time of turmoil, transition and transformation; a time when time itself is not on our side," he said, emphasizing that people wanted jobs and prospects for a decent life. Yet all too often, what they got instead was divisiveness, delay and denial of their dreams and aspirations. He said that the very make-up of the current General Assembly was evidence of the new thirst for progress, as many Heads of State were attending the annual event for the first time — "new leaders, installed by new voices, and expected to take decisive breaks with the past." Their people wanted to see results now, not in the distant future.

"The United Nations rightly faces the same scrutiny, the same impatience, the same demands for accountability," he continued, saying that the world's people did not look to the Organization to be a mirror simply reflecting a divided world. People wanted solutions today. They wanted ideas, leadership and concrete hope for the future. "Our duty is to respond to these frustrations and yearnings," he said, underscoring that his action agenda highlighted five imperatives: sustainable development, prevention, building a more secure world, helping countries in transition and empowering women and youth.

He went on to acknowledge some important steps forward had been taken on many of those fronts: democratic transitions were under way in the Arab world, Myanmar and elsewhere; Africa's economic growth was outpacing that of virtually all other regions; and Asia and Latin America were making important advances. Yet, the level of ambition must be raised. "We need more from each and every one of you. And the world needs more from our United Nations," he said, stressing that sustainable development was the key to humankind's hopes for the future.

Yet the misuse of resources threatened the planet's limits; ecosystems were reaching their breaking point and "the world's best scientists are telling us we should change course before it's too late." Secretary-General Ban recalled that yesterday, he had announced that the "Sustainable Energy for All" was ready to deliver tens of billions of dollars to enhance energy access worldwide. Tomorrow, he would launch the "Education First" initiative, and on Thursday he would launch a major scale up of funds to bolster the global nutrition movement. Further, he said that the partners that comprised the "Every Woman, Every Child" initiative had disbursed funds totalling some \$10 billion.

"We are proving on the ground that well-conceived partnerships are delivering results — results that none of us can deliver alone," he said. The deadline for the Millennium Development Goals was little more than five years away and it was time for the international community to intensify efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. The economic crisis could not be an excuse for falling short on pledges made. Yet, even if the Millennium Goals were achieved, he said, "we still have a long way to go." The recent United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development — known as "Rio+20" — had pointed the way forward, even towards a set of Sustainable Development Goals. He recalled that the targets set by the Millennium Declaration had sparked a global movement of mobilization for development. The new Goals must do the same, inspiring action across the world.

He went on to say that climate change remained "a major piece of unfinished business," and while Member States had agreed last year to reach a legally binding deal by 2015, they must make good on that promise. "Time is running out on our ability to limit the rise in global temperature to 2 degrees centigrade," he said. Changing course would not be easy, but to see that only as a burden missed the bigger picture. Indeed, sustainability and the green economy offered compelling opportunities to promote jobs, growth, innovation and long-term stability. "The future we want can be ours — if we act now," he said.

Turning to peace and security matters, the Secretary-General said he remained profoundly concerned by ongoing violence in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, he urged Sudan and South Sudan to resolve all remaining post-secession issues. And while both Somalia and

Libya had made respective important steps in the past year, those gains must be nurtured and sustained. "And we must keep our focus on preventing conflicts before they erupt and on settling disputes through peaceful means," he said, also noting that while Myanmar's leaders had shown courage and determination in moving on a path of democracy and reconciliation, that country faced many challenges that would require the support of the United Nations and the wider international community to overcome.

Continuing, he said that the crisis in the Sahel was not getting sufficient attention and support. Poverty, fragility, drought and sectarian tensions were threats to stability across the region. Unconstitutional changes of Government were taking place all too frequently. Extremism was on the rise. Arms were easy to obtain, while jobs were hard to find. "The international community needs a major concerted effort to address this alarming situation," he said, announcing that tomorrow he planned to outline the Organization's integrated strategy, with regional Governments and organizations expected to fill in the details in the coming weeks. He urged delegations to support that initiative, and also said that the Sahel crisis highlighted the need to strengthen early warning systems. "We must do more to detect the tremors of distress facing the poorest and most vulnerable," he said.

As for Syria, he said the situation there grew worse every day, and the crisis was no longer limited to just that country; it was a regional calamity with global ramifications. "This is a serious and growing threat to international peace and security which requires Security Council action," he said, calling on the international community, including the Council and especially countries in the region, "to solidly and concretely support the efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi. We must stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides and set in motion a Syrian-led transition as soon as possible," he said, stressing that the humanitarian needs were escalating. The international community should not "look the other way" as violence spiralled out of control, he said, citing brutal human rights abuses. "Such crimes must not go unpunished. There is no statute of limitations for such extreme violence," he said, adding: "it is our duty to give tangible meaning to the responsibility to protect."

On the wider Middle East, he said that after decades of harsh occupation and humiliating restrictions in almost every aspect of their lives, the Palestinian people must be able to realize their right to a viable State of their own. Likewise, Israel must be able to live in peace and security, free from threats and rockets. Yet, while the two-State solution was the only sustainable option, the door to that path might be closing for good, as Israeli settlement growth continued in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. "We must break this dangerous impasse," he declared, rejecting both the language of de-legitimization and threats of potential military action by one State against another.

Any such attacks would be devastating, he said, underscoring that the "shrill talk of war" in recent weeks had been alarming. Leaders had a responsibility to use their voices to lower tensions instead of raising the temperature and volatility of the moment. On other matters, he looked forward to a successful conference later this year on the establishment of a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone, and in that regard, stressed that Iran must prove the solely peaceful intent of its nuclear programme. In addition, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must move towards the de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

The Secretary-General also highlighted other pressing issues, and stressed that neither peace nor development could be achieved without human rights and the rule of law, women's empowerment and the protection of children and the numerous declarations and treaties that had extended the "umbrella of protection." Yesterday's high-level meeting of the Assembly on the Rule of law had sent a strong message about the importance of international law, justice and institutions within and among nations. He said that over the past two weeks a "disgraceful act of great insensitivity" had led to "justifiable offence and unjustifiable violence". "Freedom of speech and assembly are fundamental. But, neither of those freedoms is a license to incite or commit violence," he said, noting at the same time that all too often, divisions were exploited for short-term political gains. "Too many people are tolerant of intolerance," he said, urging the moderate majority to empower itself and reject bigotry.

With so much at stake, the United Nations must continue to renew itself. "We must continue to deliver as one, cooperating across disciplines, structures and locations, building a global organization with a global presence," he said. Staff mobility was a crucial first step and that initiative was long overdue. He said the Secretariat would be making a relevant proposal in the week ahead and he asked for the Assembly's support. One of the aims was to ensure a streamlined budget. He also called for harnessing the full power of partnerships across the full range of the Organization's work, and announced that he would shortly make proposals aimed at enhancing accountability and improving coherence. The Assembly's support would be crucial to ensuring that the Organization met its many mandates.

"You, the world's leaders hold in your hands the power of State, the levers of Government. Your people expect you to listen to their aspirations and to unleash their energies and ideas," he said, emphasizing that the world expected political leaders to work with each other for the common good. While no one could do everything, every individual, in their own way, could do something. Together, if everyone upheld their

responsibilities, today's tests could be met, opportunities could be grasped, and new life could be given to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, he declared.

The President of the General Assembly, VUK JEREMIĆ of Serbia, said like many other nations his country had travelled through periods of tragedy and glory. At the close of the twentieth century, a founding member of the United Nations, it had descended into internal strife, with fratricide leaving deep wounds. "A painful era has now come to an end," he said, noting that today, Serbia stood with confidence before the international community again. It did so to advance the common interest of mankind, and was dedicated to shaping a world in which peace might triumph and international law prevail.

The General Assembly was the chief deliberative policy making body, he said; a grand "pantheon of hope" for the peoples of the world. The United Nations Charter had been written so all would adhere to the same rules. Its purpose was clear: to set up, for the first time, a workable international system that aspired to justice and ensured equal rights and equal dignity to all States.

The geopolitical landscape of today was unlike any that had been seen, he said; one of truly global interdependence. The international system was growing more volatile and a number of variables in the global equation required heightened attention. Across the board, States were aspiring to greater roles in their regions and beyond. As a result, virtually no ones' position was the same today as a generation ago, making consensus more difficult to reach. Capabilities once thought to be exclusively in State hands, like inflicting harm on a massive scale, had grown more accessible to non-State actors. "We must find a way to act in concert, so that the legitimate needs and concerns of Member States can be met," he said.

In addition, there was the quest for empowerment, he said, noting that whatever their grievances, people around the world sought more say in shaping their destinies, a scenario perhaps most visible in the Middle East. There were concerns, however, that the Arab Spring had generated unintended consequences, among them, ethnic and tribal tensions, many of which had been long-suppressed. The legacy of the noble quest for empowerment in the Middle East hinged on how those and other dangers were tackled. Given the region's global political and economic significance, events would have far-reaching implications for the world.

He went on to say that rarely had it been more necessary for the world to draw closer together, and it was critical to reinforce universal adherence to rules that were implemented without partiality. Selective enforcement could quickly erode the basis for trust. Such a scenario was clearly not in the United Nations interest and it was essential that efforts reinforced respect for State sovereignty and territorial integrity.

He noted that the United Nations Charter enjoined disputing parties to first seek a solution by, *inter alia*, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and judicial settlement, and with that in mind, he had proposed the theme on the peaceful settlement of disputes. However, peace was not merely the absence of war; it required the reconciliation of those who were at odds. Only in that way could lasting peace be achieved. A solution to an international problem could be achieved only by renouncing unilateralism, and only when parties committed to settlement. In such efforts, the Assembly could be a "moral guarantor" of what had been agreed. He looked forward to hearing proposals on how better to use existing mechanisms for peaceful dispute settlement and for revitalizing the Assembly.

Outlining his priorities, he said he would launch efforts to harness the expertise of institutes and think tanks. A formal advisory panel would provide him with guidance on the myriad issues to be considered by the Assembly, including a post-2015 development agenda. He would encourage the process to develop sustainable development goals, and establish a process to propose options for effectively financing them.

Moving forward, more emphasis must be placed on economic growth, job creation, and the production of green goods and services in a more equitable trading environment.

Moreover, sovereign equality would lose its meaning if it was understood as a political principle, downplaying its economic dimension, he said, pressing the Assembly to participate more actively in advancing the global economic governance agenda. No country could lift itself out of poverty if had no right to have its voice heard. He would convene a high-level informal meeting aimed at enhancing collaboration among the Assembly, international financial institutions and the Group of Twenty (G-20). The Alliance of Civilizations was also underused, and guided by the Assembly, could help the world expunge problems of the past.

In sum, he said the United Nations would be as strong as Member States chose to make it. Citing Ralph Waldo Emerson, he said: "an institution is the lengthened shadow of man". From the ancients to our own times, generations had endeavoured to advance the noble cause of peaceful dispute settlement. The culmination of those efforts was the United Nations Charter, "our surest guide in this time of consequence". He urged delegates to find a tenacity of purpose and the courage to master the challenges ahead, saying if they worked with faith and common purpose, the Assembly could go down in history as an "Assembly of peace".

Statements

DILMA ROUSSEFF, President of Brazil, said orthodox fiscal policies were worsening the recession in developed economies, with repercussions for emerging countries. Leaders of the developed world had not yet found a path that combined appropriate fiscal adjustments with measures to stimulate investment and demand; monetary policy could not be the only response to growing unemployment, the increase in poverty and the dismay that affected the most vulnerable segments of the world's population. Developed countries were making use of expansionist monetary policy, which wreaked havoc on exchange rates, thereby causing artificial appreciation of emerging countries' currencies, making them lose "market space", which only deepened the global recession. Nor could she accept that the legitimate trade defence initiatives of developing countries were unfairly classified as protectionism; protectionism in all forms must be fought.

In sum, she said, there would be no effective response to the economic crisis without a reconfiguration of the relationship between fiscal and monetary policy, in order to control the "currency war" and stimulate global demand. Brazil had managed to maintain extremely high employment levels, continuing to reduce social inequality and significantly increase workers' income. It had exerted strict control over public spending and increased investments in infrastructure and education. It had also controlled inflation and vigorously promoted policies aimed at social inclusion and poverty eradication. Additionally, Brazil was carrying out structural reforms in the financial and welfare areas, and it had reduced the tax burden and energy costs. It had also invested in knowledge to generate science, technology, and innovation.

While important social movements, with varying political orientations, had swept away despotic regimes across the Middle East and North Africa, the meaning and direction of those transitions still could not be clearly discerned, she said. Yet, in all of those movements, cries of protest against poverty, unemployment and the lack of opportunities and of civil rights imposed by authoritarian Governments were easy to identify. Brazil condemned in the strongest terms the violence raging in Syria, for which the Damascus Government bore the largest share of responsibility. However, her country was also aware of the responsibilities of armed opposition groups, especially those increasingly reliant on foreign military and logistical support. There was no military solution to the crisis. Diplomacy and dialogue were the only option. Further, as President of a country host to thousands of Brazilian Muslims, she said "I declare here today our vehement repudiation of the escalation of Islamophobic prejudice in Western countries."

Touching on the Israeli-Palestinian question, she reiterated her Government's support for the recognition of the Palestinian State as a full United Nations member, stressing that only a free and sovereign Palestine would be able to fulfil Israel's legitimate desires for peace, security and regional political stability. The international community had encountered growing difficulty in dealing with regional conflicts. To that, she said it was critical not to allow the Security Council to be replaced — as had been happening — by coalitions formed without its consent, beyond its control and without due regard for international law. Use of force without Council authorization was illegal, yet some quarters were starting to see that as an acceptable option. Brazil sought legitimate actions, founded on international legality. In that spirit, she had defended the need for a "responsibility while protecting" as a complement to the "responsibility to protect".

Turning to the Rio+20 Conference, she said the outcome not only preserved the 1992 legacy, but also set the starting point for a sustainable development agenda. The United Nations had before it several tasks mandated by the Conference, she said, adding that the enormous gathering had shone a powerful light on the "future we want". It was crucial to heed the many warnings sounded by science and society and to consider climate change as a main challenge to present and further generations. In a context of environmental challenges, economic crises and threats to peace in different parts of the world, Brazil was committed to working with its neighbours; integrating in the Latin American and Caribbean region was a priority. "Our region is a good example for the world." Among other steps, it had achieved the rule of law and understood that democracy was not immune to attacks. Brazil also had reaffirmed its commitment to keeping its region free from weapons of mass destruction, she said, stressing that the world clamoured for food instead of weapons. Finally, she said the time had long passed to put an end to the economic embargo against Cuba. In closing, she said the world community must work to ensure multipolarity prevailed; cooperation predominated over conflict; dialogue overcame threats; and negotiated solutions forestalled use-of-force interventions.

BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States, began his address by telling the story of Chris Stevens, a diplomat who had been killed recently in an attack on the American embassy in Benghazi, Libya. Mr. Stevens, he said, had worked across the Muslim world, from Egypt to Syria, from Saudi Arabia to Libya. He spoke Arabic; he walked the streets of the places where he worked, tasting the food and listening to the people. When the upheaval in Libya began, he had cared for the wounded and helped to craft a future in which the rights of all Libyans would be respected. "Chris Stevens loved his work" and saw dignity in the people he met. He had embodied the best of the United States, building bridges across oceans and cultures. He acted with humility, but stood up for the principles of liberty, dignity, justice and opportunity. "The attacks on civilians in Benghazi were attacks on America," he said, adding that there should be no doubt that the United States would be relentless in seeking out Mr. Stevens' killers and bringing them to justice.

However, he said, the various attacks of the last two weeks were not just an assault on the United States, but on the very ideals upon which the United Nations was founded: the notion that people could resolve their differences peacefully, and that diplomacy could take the place of war. "If we are serious about upholding these ideals, it will not be enough to put more guards outside of an embassy [...] we must speak honestly about the deeper causes of the crisis," he stressed. "Today we must affirm that our future will be determined by people like Chris Stevens, and not by his killers," he said.

It had been less than two years since the world was captivated by the transformations in the Middle East and in North Africa. The United States had supported the transitions in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, and it had intervened in Libya alongside a broad coalition and with a Security Council mandate, because the aspirations of people were more powerful than a tyrant. "And as we meet here, we again declare that the regime of Syrian President Assad must come to an end so that the suffering of the Syrian people can stop and a new dawn can begin." "This is a season of progress," he added, recalling elections had been seen across the Arab world. Peaceful transitions of power had taken place in Malawi and Senegal, and a new President was in place in Somalia. In Burma, a closed society was opening and people looked forward to further reform. "Around the world, people are making their voices heard" and asserting their innate dignity, he said.

However, he continued, the path to democracy did not end with the casting of a ballot. Quoting former South African President Nelson Mandela, he said, "To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects the freedom of others". Freedom depended on the rule of law and due process, and "real freedom is hard work". Those in power needed to resist the urge to "crack down on dissidents", and must instead focus on the painstaking work of reform. Indeed, there would always be extremists who fanned the flames of hatred, he said. The world had witnessed the convulsions that could accompany transitions to a new political order. They often arose from the difficulties of reconciling tradition and faith with the diversity and interdependence of the modern world.

In that vein, he said, a "crude and disgusting video" had recently sparked out rage across the Muslim world. He reiterated that the United States had had nothing to do with it, and that it was an insult both to Muslims around the world and to Americans, as well. The United States had laws in place that protected individuals from harm "because of how they look or for what they believe", he said. Many people wondered why the United States did not just ban such a video, and to that he answered that the United States Constitution protected the right of all to practice free speech. Americans had fought and died across the world to allow people to express their views, because in a diverse society, efforts to reduce speech could quickly become tools to silence critics and oppress minorities. "The strongest weapon against hateful speech ... is more speech," he said, voices of tolerance that lifted up the values of mutual understanding and respect.

The United States recognized that not all countries believed in the right to free speech. But, in today's world, the notion that the flow of information could be controlled was obsolete. The question was how to respond to hateful speech. "There is no speech that justifies mindless violence," he said; there were no words that justified killing, no slander that provided an excuse to cause death or destruction.

The United States would not seek to dictate the outcomes of transitions abroad, he continued. But, it was the responsibility of all leaders to speak out forcefully against violence. Hatred of the America, the West or of Israel could not be a political rallying cry, and it could not deliver on the promise of freedom. "Smashing apart a restaurant does not fill an empty stomach," but only made it harder to achieve what "we must do together: educating our children and creating the opportunities they deserve, protecting human rights and extending democracy's promise."

The United States would not retreat from the world, he said. Yet, efforts in the fields of development, energy and other areas depended on a spirit of mutual interest and respect. For partnerships to be effective, citizens must be secure and efforts welcome. Politics based only on anger set back international cooperation and set back those who tolerated it, he added. In that vein, he reminded Member States that it was Muslims who had suffered the most at the hands of extremists. The impulse towards intolerance and violence might initially be focused on the West, but ultimately it could not be contained, and would affect relationships between Sunni and Shiites, between tribes and clans.

On many issues, the world now faced a choice between "the promise of the future and the prisons of the past", "and we cannot afford to get it wrong". Instead, he said, "we must seize this moment". The future must not be shaped by those who bullied women, but by girls who went to school. It must not belong to the corrupt few who steal resources, but by students and business owners. It must not belong to the vision of those who slandered religions or who denied the Holocaust. It was time to heed the words of Mohandas Gandhi, who had said, "intolerance is itself a form of violence". People must work towards a world that was strengthened by their differences, not defined by them.

In the Middle East, the road was hard but the destination was clear: an independent, prosperous Palestine and a secure Israel. Understanding that such a peace must come through a just agreement between the parties, the United States could walk alongside all those that were willing to make that journey. In

Syria, the future must not belong to a dictator who tortured children or shot rockets at apartment buildings, and what began with citizens defending their rights should not end in a cycle of sectarian violence. All Syrians must have a say in their Government, and that was the outcome towards which the United States would work.

In Iran, the world could see where the path of a violent and unaccountable ideology would lead. Many there wished to enjoy peace and prosperity among their neighbours, he said; instead, the country continued to restrict the rights of its people and to "prop up" a dictator in Damascus. In addition, Iran had still not yet demonstrated that its nuclear programme was peaceful or cooperated with the United Nations in that arena. While there was still time and space to do so, he stressed that "that time is not unlimited". "Make no mistake, a nuclear armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained," he added, noting that it would threaten the security of Israel and the stability of the Gulf nations and the international economy. That was why a coalition of Governments was holding Iran accountable, and the United States would "do what it must" to prevent it from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

It was because of the progress he had witnessed in his own lifetime, and in the past four years of his presidency, that he remained ever hopeful, he said. The Iraq war was over and the transition had begun in Afghanistan. Al-Qaida had been weakened and Osama Bin Laden was no more. More power was in the hands of citizens across the world. But, what provided the most hope was not the actions of leaders, but of peoples. For every angry mob shown on television, there were billions who shared similar hopes and dreams, who reminded the world that there was "a common heartbeat to humanity". When all was stripped away, people everywhere longed for the freedom to determine their destiny, the dignity of work, the comfort that comes from faith, and the justice that existed when governments served their people — and not the other way around. The United States would always stand up for those aspirations, he said. He promised Member States that, long after Chris Stevens' killers were brought to justice, his legacy would live on in the lives of the people he touched. "So long as we work for it, justice will be done," and the rising tide of liberty would never be reversed, he concluded.

TOMISLAV NIKOLIĆ, President of [Serbia](#), said today's financial crisis had left the heaviest burden on the world's most vulnerable countries. It was clear that poverty was a real source of security risks, as well as a stumbling block towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. A more equitable distribution of assets, solidarity and support to underdeveloped and developing countries should be jointly agreed upon and systematically planned. Further, renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, responsible utilization of resources and socially responsible business practices could significantly contribute to reducing poverty and starvation in the world, he said, noting that his country would contribute to research, especially devoting attention to the education of young generations in ways of achieving harmony between planet conservation, development and profit. He stressed that it was a collective obligation to fight climate change in order to protect human survival and the progress of mankind.

Other contributing factors to future development were health and education, he said. Investing in education was the best way of investing in future development. "Only when a PC and book in the hands of young people replace the gun will happier pages of human history be written," he said. For its part, Serbia had contributed to security, including through sending thousands of soldiers on United Nations missions, aligning itself with relevant international documents and seeking to contribute to global and regional anti-terrorism efforts. Serbia had also stood for religious and cultural tolerance and had played an active role in regional cooperation in areas including economics and immigration. No one should suffer or be humiliated because of their religion, but no life should be lost in religiously-motivated clashes, he said, condemning attacks on innocent people and conveying his condolences to the United States over the killing of its ambassador to Libya.

Turning to the European Union, he said Serbia truly wished to become a full-fledged member and was patiently building relations of confidence and peace in a region burdened with a heavy legacy of the past. Unfortunately, despite Serbia's commitment and compliance with international law, in 2008 the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo unilaterally declared independence. Kosovo and Metohija was an integral part of Serbia, he said, noting that his country had become a victim of double standards, whereby the principle of the respect of territorial integrity implied the prevention of the promotion of secession and of efforts aimed at border changes in other international recognized States.

"We are more and more frequently forced by the powerful and mighty to face a tough choice: to give up Kosovo and Metohija or European Union membership. What kind of a choice is that? I hope that no one in this hall would ever be confronted with such a decision," he said. Serbia was fully committed to participating in the process that should result in peace between Serbs and Albanians. At the same time, he emphasized that Serbia would not, under any circumstances, recognize the unilaterally declared independence of its southern province of Kosovo and Metohija. He proposed discreet negotiations at the highest political level. An agreement could be reached only through consensus without unilateral decisions and actions.

He then condemned an attempt by the “so-called Republic of Kosovo” to dispossess Serbia’s southern province of its historical and spiritual heritage and to turn the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church into “so-called Kosovo” cultural heritage. He was particularly concerned that the attempt was taking place in the twenty-first century before the eyes of the international community. Turning to another sensitive area, he urged an investigation into allegations of human and organ trafficking. “We are simply asking for the truth,” he said.

BONI YAYI, President of Benin, said that in a world shaken by multiple crises, today’s debate offered the opportunity to ensure peace and security, and to improve global governance for economic growth. Welcoming the Assembly’s theme of the peaceful settlement of international disputes, he hoped the focus on that “thorny” question would offer solutions that would allow Africa to devote its resources to sustainable development. Indeed, progress on the continent was constrained by the circulation of small arms and light weapons, which fed transnational organized crime; piracy and armed robbery at sea off the Horn of Africa; un- and under-employment; a lack of food and chronic malnutrition; soil erosion; climate upheavals; and poor governance, to name a few.

Despite such difficulties, elections in African nations throughout 2011 and 2012 showed their adherence to a process that was rooting democracy and the rule of law on the continent. In that vein, he discussed efforts by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to address crises in Mali and Guinea Bissau, saying that in Mali, terrorist cells threatened to destabilize the entire West African subregion. He appealed for help in eliminating that threat and preventing large-scale humanitarian disasters. In Guinea Bissau, he hoped mediation efforts by ECOWAS and other partners would bring about a coordinated approach to resolving the crisis.

Elsewhere, he welcomed African Union and international efforts to pursue peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Madagascar, urging more work with the Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union to mediate conflicts, build peace and promote human rights. More focus must be placed on financing peacekeeping operations, including the African Standby Force. Measures to rationalize the United Nations had resulted in the creation of many useful new bodies, he said, including the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council. Reform of the Security Council should make that body inclusive, and one that repaired the historical injustice to Africa. Such efforts must be complemented by others to involve youth and women in the Organization.

Turning to the Middle East, he said the United Nations had the wherewithal to find a solution to the Palestinian situation. Africa favoured a “one land two States” approach to restore peace, as Palestinians and Israelis must be able to live in friendship, peace and prosperity. On economic matters, he said the economic slowdown, which started in 2008, persisted, with millions of people still unemployed, many of whom were in Africa. Aid for development had fallen, while 16 million people in the Sahel faced famine and malnutrition, despite collective efforts, including by the African Union through the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). He hoped the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons advising the Secretary-General on the post-2015 development agenda would suggest a sustainable human development vision that centred on equity.

He went on to say that Africa could become a global growth engine with professionalized youth, and with that in mind, had decided to create a free trade zone to accelerate growth. In its unabating fight against poverty, it had no choice than to ensure progress on multiple fronts — food, health, water, environment, primary education, empowering women and children and fighting HIV/AIDS among them. He hoped the sovereign debt problems facing northern partners would not distract them from increasing their aid for development. He was pleased that Heads of State at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development said they would spare no effort in achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In closing, he said a new world presupposed inclusive governance in international bodies. Only by sharing resources and technology would a new world characterized by peace, security and shared prosperity be possible.

SAULI NIINISTÖ, President of Finland, said profound change was sweeping the globe. Rapid economic growth in the global South had created greater well-being for hundreds of millions of people. Many people had the chance to lift themselves out of poverty and still others had a chance for political participation. At the same time, the tectonic plates of economic power were shifting, and global instruments were needed to manage that shift. A number of “G-Groups” had an important role to play in making the United Nations a more dynamic and relevant player in the world economy.

Finland supported the United Nations because it was in its national interest to do so, he said, underlining its unique legitimacy as a genuinely universal forum for cooperation. Finland was a candidate for non-permanent membership to the Security Council for the 2013-2014 term, and would approach issues on the Council’s agenda as an engaged Member State looking for even-handed solutions. “We believe that as a small and militarily non-allied Member State, we have got what it takes”, he said. The ability to prevent conflict was the United Nations core mission and Finland had participated in United Nations peacekeeping as long as it had been a Member State. The country was fully committed to continue that contribution.

While peacekeeping was indispensable, soldiers also were needed to secure the conditions for peace to begin, which was why Finland had long paid special attention to civilian crisis management. Effective mediation was also a must and Finland had made a strong contribution in that regard, notably with an Assembly resolution, initiated by Finland and Turkey, last year on strengthening the normative basis for mediation. Respect for the rule of law was part and parcel of building peace in post-conflict societies and it required States to condemn all violence. Finland and the Nordic countries would again introduce a resolution on the protection of diplomatic missions.

Turning to poverty reduction, he said Finland had been a reliable partner for developing countries for over half a century, having increased its development cooperation over the past ten years to an annual \$1.5 billion. Finland also had supported the Non-proliferation Treaty and was prepared to host a conference this year on the creation of a Middle East Zone free from nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. Further, it was ready to place the Finnish Institute for Verification of the Chemical Weapons Convention at the international community's disposal, should the need arise in the Middle East. As a co-sponsor in the Arms Trade Treaty process, Finland continued to reach out for a substantive and as nearly universal treaty as possible.

On other matters, he said the United Nations had been "instrumental" in laying the groundwork for a hopeful future in Libya. But, the situation in Syria was tragic and the Security Council had been unable to take a leading role under the Charter. Council members must find a way out of that crisis, as the United Nations' authority would suffer if efforts to end it moved elsewhere. In the broader Middle East, a two-State solution involving an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living in peace and security with Israel was slipping out of reach. "The negotiations must restart," he said, with a view to creating a Palestinian State and respecting Israel's security concerns. Voicing hope that elections would see Finland entrusted with power and attendant responsibility in the Security Council for two years, he said Finland would work constructively and pragmatically, in order to maintain and strengthen international peace and security.

DEMETRIS CHRISTOFIAS, President of Cyprus, said that the sovereignty of people was and remained a fundamental principle of the Organization and the functioning of States. The international community should address the recent events in the Middle East and North Africa through that prism, respecting the right of each people to determine its own future. It was with great sadness, however, that the world was witnessing the loss of human lives. Increased violence in Syria continued and potential spill-over effects to neighbouring countries were a great cause of concern. Strongly condemning the violence and the massacres of innocent civilians in Syria and calling for their immediate cessation, he said that country was undoubtedly experiencing a humanitarian crisis. Cyprus stood ready to contribute to international efforts to manage that crisis, for the additional reason that the "fire is raging outside our door".

In that context, however, the country remained committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and stressed the need for a political solution to the crisis. He joined with others in expressing unequivocal support for the newly appointed Special Envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, and hoped that he would help bring about the conflict's end. Against that backdrop, he said, the Middle East Peace Process continued to be at an impasse. It was imperative to resume negotiations, which would eventually lead to the implementation of a Security Council resolution and the establishment of a free and independent Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 border. The solution must at the same time address the legitimate security concerns of Israel.

Cyprus was continuing to deal with the consequences of the 1974 Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation of more than one third of its territory, he continued. Turkey continued to violate the human rights and fundamental freedoms of tens of thousands of displaced persons, including the usurpation of their property. Since he assumed the Presidency of Cyprus in 2008, he had worked to end the stalemate and start a new process of direct negotiations with the then-Turkish Cypriot leader, Mehmet Ali Talat. However, since 2010, the new Turkish Cypriot leader, Derviş Eroğlu, had broken the commitment to continue talks and had retracted from all the convergences achieved with the previous leadership.

Last March, the Turkish Cypriot leadership had responded to the assumption of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union by Cyprus by leaving the negotiations. They demanded that artificial deadlines be applied to such talks, in contrast to what was agreed with the Secretary-General and the Security Council in its resolution 2026 (2011). Indeed, the process framed by that resolution was the only way that Cyprus intended to proceed, he continued. "Our commitment remains unchanged", he said in that respect, adding, "negotiations must be carried out. They must continue." He called on the other side to return to the table and continue the dialogue, urging them to "share our visions for a free, united Cyprus".

To that end, the positive contribution of all parties was vital. Instead, however, Turkey had been pursuing "gunboat diplomacy" with its displays of its military strength in Cyprus. That alarming behaviour had been escalating since last September, when Cyprus had proceeded with exploration activities in its exclusive economic zone, within the rights accorded to it by international law and particularly by the United Nations

Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982. Turkey had not signed onto that Convention and did not abide by the relevant customary international law; moreover, it had neither claimed an exclusive economic zone nor concluded an agreement delimiting its exclusive economic zone in the eastern Mediterranean. Further, it had not pursued an agreement on the delimitation of its maritime boundaries with Cyprus. To the contrary, Turkey undertook unilateral actions in respect of sea areas that were patently beyond any reasonable geographic or legal limits of its own continental shelf and potential exclusive economic zone, and clearly falling within the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of Cyprus. He called on Turkey to cease its provocative behaviour.

SHEIKH HAMAD BIN KHALIFA AL-THANI, Amir of Qatar, said that the Arab world was currently weathering a period that was "difficult and risky" and at the same time offered the prospects of hope. Indeed, the current tremors were an impressive attempt to correct prevailing conditions in the region at a time when the entire world was changing rapidly. The unprecedented Arab experience was proving vastly different from previous transitions that had occurred elsewhere, and even if from afar the conditions seemed troubling or "filled with flames and smoke", he assured delegations that what they were hearing and seeing was in fact a region struggling to cope with the times and overcome obstacles that had hampered its march forward. The region was, at last, taking matters into its own hands after having suffered years of dictatorship, dependence and corruption.

Recalling that the American political and social experience had risen from the ashes of civil war, and that Europe had gone through terrible world wars before achieving a degree of unity that could not be attained by arms or hegemony, he said that the events in the Arab region were "natural and historic". He said that people could not attain freedom by merely asking for it and history was replete with examples of people risking their lives and wealth for liberty. At the same time, it required resistance to depose dictators and hard work to overcome backwardness. Further, occupied territories could never be restored simply by merely rejecting occupation. It required persistence in demanding rights and resistance through all legitimate means.

What made the situation so unique in his region was that Arabs and Muslims had high aspirations and that the changes were occurring "under the spotlights [...] and satellites" and under the influence of electronic media without any barriers. Along with others in the region and beyond, Qatar had recognized the risk of the current events in the Arab world. "If we would ask for something in this session, it would be the renewed encouragement that confirms the rights of our Arab world to continue its advancement and achieve its aspirations in a new world influenced by science and technology," that the pioneers that had written our well-known conventions on rights and freedoms could never have foreseen.

At the same time, he hoped that delegations gathered for the general debate would sympathize with the historical transformations under way in the Arab world. That would reassure peoples who were marching with determination towards "a place fit for them in history" with the hope of a better tomorrow for future generations. Turning to the "unacceptable" situation in Syria, he said that hundreds of people were being killed every day under fire from a regime that did not hesitate to use weapons against its citizens. All international efforts, including by the Security Council, had failed to pull Syria out of the current cycle of violence, so he believed it was better for "Arab countries themselves to interfere, out of the national, humanitarian, political and military duties" to the region, and to do what was necessary to stop the bloodshed in Syria.

He said that, despite the suffering in specific countries, the core problem in the Middle East remained the Palestinian question, including the ongoing Israeli occupation of Arab territories throughout the region and the stifling blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. The peace process was at a stalemate because Israel continued to expand its settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territory and East Jerusalem. Sometimes, he asked why the international community did not do more to implement countless resolutions on the issue and why the Security Council would not adopt a Chapter VII resolution forcing Israel to end the blockade, halt settlement construction and return to peace talks. His question remained unanswered.

Finally, while expressing strong support for freedom of expression, he reiterated his belief that such liberties should not be used as tools to hurt or insult others. To that end, he urged a balance between the respect for sacred faiths and religions and the freedom of expression so that stereotypes would be rejected and tolerance would trump intolerance. He called on the United Nations and concerned parties to start the process of elaborating "laws, procedures and controls to prevent insulting religions and faiths under any pretext, and, at the same time, keep the rights of man to know and express his opinion."

ROSSEN PLEVNELIEV, President of Bulgaria, said that unfortunately the historic transformations in politics and technology being witnessed by the world did not always bring peace and stability and in many situations human suffering and destruction still occurred. For that reason, the main theme of the General Debate, the peaceful settlement of disputes, could not be more relevant. Mediation and good offices should be a tool of preference to deal with escalating tension. Noting that a few weeks ago, at the Sofia Synagogue, tribute was paid to the memory of the five Israelis and one Bulgarian killed in an attack on tourists last July, he stressed that delivering justice was vital for addressing terrorism, which he called "one of the ugliest and most

despicable crimes against humanity”, which had no justification and which his country would spare no effort in countering. He also condemned violent acts committed recently in the name of defending religious beliefs, urging all involved to show tolerance and avoid provocative actions.

In Syria as well, he condemned what he called gross violations of basic United Nations principles, calling for full accountability from the perpetrators, including through the International Criminal Court. Supporting the actions of the European Union in providing humanitarian assistance, he called for the start of a transition towards a democratic State that included all ethnicities, noting that his country had supported opposition groups in their efforts to unite over a democratic alternative to the current regime. Welcoming steps made towards democratic reform in the context of the so-called Arab Spring, he said that the reactivation of the Middle East Peace process was needed now more than ever and looked forward to the resumption of direct negotiations, expecting both parties to demonstrate continued commitment to a peaceful settlement that respected the legitimate interests and sensitivities of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, based on the two-State solution.

In the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, he called for the continued strengthening of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other major instruments, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, and supported the negotiation process leading to the adoption of a legally-binding and robust Arms Trade Treaty. He said that Iran’s full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was of “paramount importance”, looking forward to resumed high-level negotiations and concrete confidence-building steps.

Expressing support for the role of the Human Rights Council, he announced that his country would be seeking, for the first time, election to that body for the period 2019 to 2021. He said his country had gone through a successful transition from totalitarian rule to a functioning democracy over the past two decades, adding that its greatest achievement was preserving the long-standing tradition of tolerance and dialogue between ethnic communities and noting the coexistence of houses of worship of Islam, Judaism and Catholic and Orthodox Christianity in his capital city, amidst archaeological monuments of several ancient civilizations. In that light, over a year ago Bulgaria initiated an international forum called the “Sofia Platform”, providing a venue for dialogue between all segments of societies focussed on the transition processes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East. Affirming the value of reform and cooperation processes leading to enlargement of the membership of the European Union, he expressed support for greater subregional cooperation in south-eastern Europe through the best use of existing bodies.

Affirming also the importance of the Rio+20 outcome, he called for effective follow-up through the General Assembly, particularly on the formulation of Sustainable Development Goals, recognizing an important role for the Economic and Social Council in that process and pledging readiness to contribute as a current member of the latter body. He stressed that his country was deeply committed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and was working to gradually increase its share as a donor of development and humanitarian aid to meet its commitments. During the Assembly session, it would sign the Food Assistance Convention. He expressed high appreciation for the Education First initiative of the Secretary-General, advocated for the re-election of Irina Bokova as the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for another term and described a growing partnership between his country and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Finally, he affirmed full support for building a stronger rule-based multilateral system with the United Nations at its centre.

SUSILO BAMBANG YUDHOYONO, President of Indonesia, said that, in the decades since its founding, the United Nations had developed a number of instruments to address conflicts in all their manifestations. Many inter- and intra-State conflicts had been resolved, he said, citing, in that respect, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Timor-Leste and many more. “The question we must ask now is whether these instruments are adequate to address the whole spectrum of conflicts that the world community now faces,” he said. That question was clearly evident in Syria, where the world community was painfully witnessing worsening violence and the unfolding of a humanitarian catastrophe. At the same time, the United Nations was “in paralysis” in responding to the situation. Indonesia, therefore, reiterated its call for the immediate cessation of violence in Syria, calling on the Security Council to unite and act decisively as mandated by the United Nations Charter to bring the situation under control.

“We must adapt to twenty-first century security challenges”, he said, noting the likelihood that the world would see a number of similar conflicts, in different places and in different forms, in the future. While there was no question that the world today was in much better condition than the one in the last century, it had achieved only a relative peace. Instead, it had moved from the era of the Cold War to an era of “warm peace” — a peace in which old enmities and conflicts could still resurface and in which new security challenges arose from the “seismic power shifts” that were occurring in some regions. It was a warm peace in which new progress could easily regress.

In that context, he said, the first thing to do was to evolve a new strategic mindset. The cold war mentality still persisted in parts of the world, and not least in the United Nations itself. For long-term peace — born of trust and mutual confidence — that mindset must be left behind. A reformed Security Council was needed, he said in that respect, one that reflected the twenty-first century reality and provided security to all. Work must also be undertaken to perfect the instruments of peace, which was “robust regionalism”. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, for their part, had seen how such regionalism could be a force for peace and cooperation. “Once the cockpit of border wars and the proxy of extra-regional powers, Southeast Asia has now come together,” he said.

A universal culture of mutual tolerance and mutual appreciation of one another's religious convictions must be evolved, he said. Despite the determination of the United Nations in that regard, the defamation of religions persisted, as had been seen in the film *Innocence of Muslims* that was causing an international uproar. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights underlined that, in exercising their freedom of expression, everyone must observe morality and public order. “Freedom of expression is therefore not absolute”, he said. Hence, he called for an international instrument to effectively prevent incitement to hostility or violence based on religions or beliefs. For good measure, there should also be a continuing dialogue among faiths, civilizations and cultures, which should translate into actual cooperation.

In addition, the world must master the art of preventive diplomacy, he said. Most disputes were not intractable, and there was usually a window of opportunity for resolving them. That was what ASEAN had done with the potential conflicts in the South China Sea. Finally, the culture of peace, mutual tolerance and appreciation, as well as cooperation, must be supported by the “right kind of economics”. People needed to be fed, sheltered and assured of a future with opportunities. Indeed, the price of inequality between nations and within nations could be a tension born of grievances that could, unless effectively addressed, lead to radicalism and even violence, and threaten international peace and security. The solution was to form a global partnership for poverty eradication and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as to formulate a post-Millennium Development Goals agenda that could be fully carried out.

MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI, President of Georgia, said 20 months after a young Tunisian's desperate act had generated hopes around the world, joy had been replaced by broken promises, and messages that the international system was more stable when fewer societies were open. “I came here today to tell the opposite,” he said, “to make the case for open societies”. Following the attack on the United States consulate in Benghazi, he had been struck by United States diplomats who still believed that Libya's liberation was a “good thing”, and by Benghazi citizens, who just days ago, had stood up against the fundamentalist militias responsible for the violence.

He had been struck by the visit to the United States last week by Aung San Suu Kyi, he said, and her story of progress towards freedom in the face of seemingly impossible odds. A free society was not one without problems; on the contrary, it was one where problems were more visible and arguments were open for all to see. Georgia had confronted democracy's challenges in the last week, amid evidence of prison abuses. Those responsible had been arrested and two Ministers resigned. “This is how democracies learn,” he said. Building an open society entailed painful learning and significant risk taking. “These risks are worth taking”.

Events unfolding in Georgia today were part of the broader global question about whether the quest for democracy could and would endure, he said. Georgia would remain an open society. On 1 October, Georgians would vote in parliamentary elections, renewing the social contract that allowed them to freely choose their leaders. All recent elections had been observed by international observers, and he had pledged that this year's vote would be even more free and fair than in the past. Funding and air time had increased on all national channels for ads by all political parties. A code of conduct had been created to prevent political intimidation, vote buying and hate speech.

But not all actors in the Georgian political landscape shared those principles, he said, noting that responding to attempts to “short-circuit our democracy” was straightforward: democratic, transparent, rule-of-law based processes would not be compromised. Georgia was a young democracy and understood that value came from engagement with the international community. It had invited credible bodies to monitor its elections, from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to the European Parliament and United States Congress. Georgian democracy would prevail only if elections remained a Georgian process.

He went on to say that Russian forces were currently undertaking an illegal military build up in South Ossetia, having made the “extraordinary” decision to hold military exercises in the North and South Caucasus on the eve of Georgian elections. He urged the Assembly to speak in a unified voice against such threats and support Georgia's sovereign, democratic institutions. He made his appeal because the United Nations had been created to defend the integrity of all nations against such dangers, to ensure the world would never again be a lawless ocean where big sharks ate smaller fish without a global reaction.

"Pay attention and send the right signals," he stressed. Georgia's transformation, and the hostility it generated among those threatened by freedom, made it a test case for the entire region. Georgians would overcome the dark Soviet legacy of crime, corruption, domination, intimidation and despair. Georgia's view was clear. Stability could not be won at the expense of liberty, nor lasting prosperity at the expense of individual rights. In every society, people would ultimately demand the right to choose their future and only Governments that met that demand would achieve stability. Fear defined autocrats, and trust, democrats. "Let us all trust our citizens," he said. "Let us defend the institutions that support, strengthen and preserve our choice to be open and free."

DANILO MEDINA SÁNCHEZ, President of the Dominican Republic, said the global financial crisis had been caused by the lack of application of effective regulations on the international financial system, as well as by arrogance, greed and the unbridled urge to accumulate wealth. Thus, the old debates had once again arisen. The economy must be made to serve people, and not the other way around. In the debate on development, it should be reaffirmed that equity and sustainability were essential prerequisites to sustained and sustainable economic growth. However, economic growth alone would not reduce social inequalities or improve quality of life; nor was it correct to sacrifice populations in the hope that the benefits of economic growth would eventually spill over to all and reduce social inequalities. Experience had shown that healthy economic growth could be stimulated by improving the quality of life and by reducing poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, economic growth that did not take into account the limits of nature and the needs of future generations risked imminent collapse.

He said it was time to rethink the ideas about development that had predominated in the international financial system. Equity and sustainability were two sides of the same coin needed to fund human development. Development implied environmental protection, as that would increase production and reduce social inequality as a way to elevate quality of life for all. He issued a plea for investment to afford youth the opportunities to creatively confront the challenges that define societies today. By recent measurements, his country had been classified as upper-middle-income. However, more than one third of its citizens still lived in poverty. "How is it that countries like our own are excluded from development assistance?" he asked. The optimism of international estimates were not in line with the perception of many citizens who felt that the growth in gross domestic product (GDP) had done nothing to lessen their sense of despair.

As for youth, he said that despite higher education levels, they were not finding decent jobs or business opportunities. The discrepancy between the optimism of various international measures and the discontent on the streets was due to the use of inadequate indicators to measure poverty, development and well-being. In the Dominican Republic, it was difficult to support the idea that quality of life, and the chances to improve it, for a person living on less than \$2 a day, or even for those living on \$3 or \$4 per day, differed significantly from someone else whose income was a few cents less. Assumptions about poverty and underdevelopment had led to social policies limited to assigning or transferring resources to temporarily raise the incomes of impoverished families above the so-called "poverty line", sacrificing development of more effective systems of public services, which everyone had a right to access.

Poverty was a multidimensional phenomenon requiring a systematic approach that led to increasing capabilities, freedom and opportunities for those who had been traditionally excluded, he said. Developing countries should assume their share of responsibilities and should improve their information systems so as to increase awareness of social, territorial and gender inequalities, and impacts on nature. Likewise, they must redirect their investment patterns and public policies, for which international support was needed.

"It cannot be accepted that a country would no longer receive development assistance just because its average national income has risen beyond a certain arbitrarily defined threshold," he said. He called on international financial institutions to employ "more enriched" indicators with a greater capacity to capture and measure the complex and dynamic nature of human development. That meant working together to overcome exclusivity and not to maintain poverty and extreme poverty indefinitely.

FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE, President of France, addressing the Assembly for the first time since his election, said universal values were not owned by any country or individual. While they belonged to all, they were frequently trampled up in a world that was gripped by fanaticism, a stagnating global economy and climate change. The task for the United Nations was to address such challenges in a comprehensive, fair and just manner. France reiterated its deep trust in the Organization, but noted that despite all the good work that had been achieved, the United Nations had been unable to stop all war and repression.

With that sobering fact in mind, he said the most effective way for the Organization to achieve its noble goals was through reform, including of the Security Council. In that regard, France supported the calls for enlargement of the Council put forward by Germany, Japan, India and Brazil. It also favoured increasing the presence of African nations, including among the body's permanent members. Being on the Security Council was not a privilege handed down through time, he said, rather it entailed the duty to act in situations that required joint responses.

One such situation was the crisis in Syria, where 30,000 people had lost their lives in the past 19 months. "How long will the United Nations be paralyzed," he asked, adding that regardless of the international community's inertia, one thing was certain: the current regime in Syria would never again have a place among the community of nations. With that in mind, France, he said, was taking steps to recognize the provisional Government in Syria. Meanwhile, it was urging that opposition movement to reject violence and move swiftly to address the aspirations of the people.

There was also a need to stand firm against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In that regard, for the past few years Iran had evaded the inquiries of IAEA and flouted the will of the Security Council. While he wished to see substantive negotiations on Iran's nuclear ambitions, such talks had not yet occurred. As that was the case, France was prepared to adopt new sanctions. Iranian authorities must know that "enough is enough"; negotiations must begin in earnest before it was too late. Also on the Middle East, he urged action that would assist Israel and the Palestinians in overcoming their deadlock. "The status quo is not an answer, it's an impasse," he added.

Turning to another pressing issue, he said occupation by terrorists of areas of the Sahel was "unacceptable". It was a threat to the entire region and such actions by extremists must be rejected. The African Union and ECOWAS had said they were prepared to take concrete action; Malian authorities had requested the assistance of the United Nations. And, in that light, France was prepared to support any Security Council action that would bring the crisis to an end. "Mali must regain control of its territory and terrorists must be driven from this region" he declared.

On development matters, he said, among other things, that the international community must adopt a long-term response to climate change. France would be ready to host a United Nations conference on climate change in 2015 so that a comprehensive climate deal could be reached. Continuing, he said that while the Rio outcome had not met the expectations of all countries, it had nevertheless pointed the way towards a more sustainable and equitable future. Still, one of the main disappointments had been that the parameters of a United Nations environmental agency had not been firmly agreed. France would continue to press for the creation of such an agency, which would be based in Africa.

Finally, he said that the United Nations must lay the foundation for a world that was fair and equitable. The Arab Spring revolutions had shown that people were yearning for such a world. He called on the political movements that had emerged in the wake of those events to continue on a path of democracy and equality and to reject violence in all circumstances. Reiterating his country's trust in the United Nations, he said that if all Member States lived up to their responsibilities, progress in those areas could be made. "When there is inertia and inaction, injustice and intolerance can take hold [...] we must act and act together," he said, urging the Assembly to do more to live up to the expectations of the world's people.

DALIA GRYBAUSKAITĖ, President of Lithuania, drew the attention of the Assembly to one specific area: energy. Competition for natural resources had long been the source of conflicts, as energy resources were not equally distributed and existing energy dependencies were cause for abuse, not for cooperation. In addition, a lack of clear and globally accepted rules and norms in the energy sectors contributed to continuing tensions. Recurring gas and oil supply crises every year reminded the world that, in a global environment, friction and disagreements over energy still led to conflicts and tensions. Lithuania, as a small country without its own source of natural energy, was well aware of the negative consequences of energy dependency in an environment without universal agreement on and compliance with "clear rules of the game".

"What is to be done?" she asked. First, global energy sustainability needed to be increased. In that regard, she noted the Secretary-General's "Sustainable Energy for All" initiative, which was both relevant and timely. Second, existing inequalities in access to energy must become a source of cooperation, not tension. The use of energy dependency as an instrument for "political or economic blackmail" must be eliminated. With the existing practices of price-fixing and abuse of monopolistic positions — both of which distorted competition — there could be no development, no security and no effectiveness.

Third, the answer to energy-related conflict prevention should be international agreements which made clear that the use of energy to gain political goals was unacceptable. Responsibility for violations should be clear and unavoidable. In that vein, international institutions must be granted greater discretion to launch probes and impose sanctions that hindered the free flow of energy resources, impede diversification or set unfair prices for customers.

"There can be no sustainability, no development and no peaceful cooperation without nuclear safety", she said. While each country could decide its own national energy mix, those decisions could have devastating trans-boundary impact, and should be extremely well-grounded and researched. "Mistakes in nuclear energy are too costly to be allowed," she said, in that respect, welcoming the actions taken by the International Atomic Energy Agency to improve the existing system of international nuclear safety regulations. Lithuania believed that nuclear safety standards should be strengthened, and, if needed, legal international imperatives should be adopted.

The 2012 Seoul Nuclear Security Summit had clearly indicated that nuclear safety and security measures should be designed, implemented and managed in a coherent and synergistic manner, as they both had a common aim to protect the people and the environment. Keeping that in mind, Lithuania had contributed to international efforts to increase global awareness on the existing energy insecurities and ways to prevent them by establishing its Nuclear Security Centre of Excellence. Finally, she said, in order to tackle the causes, not the consequences, of conflicts, “we have to be honest players”. Problems must be honestly defined, and their reasons must be openly discussed. States must “find in ourselves the political will to play according to these rules globally”, she concluded.

PORFIRIO LOBO SOSA, President of Honduras, said the Assembly reflected a wealth of diversity, where States worked to overcome differences and respond to common problems. In such work, the international community must be partners at all times, ready to put forward solutions and reforms to strengthen the right to express that diversity. No nation should be left uninvited. Honduras had carried out reforms that respected individual rights and had invited regional and international organizations to visit.

On gender issues, he cited a policy that helped women achieve full equality and equity. His Administration projected that women’s participation in 2013 elections would reach 40 per cent, and 50 per cent in the 2017 elections. Congress had adopted a law against trafficking in persons, which complemented recommendations put forward by international human rights bodies. Another part of the country’s vision was to end the exclusion of indigenous peoples and peoples of African descent. Last year, Honduras had hosted the first World Summit on Peoples of African Descent, and next year, would host one for indigenous peoples.

Turning to the challenges ahead, he said estimates showed that illicit activities — such as money laundering, bribery, trade piracy, and trafficking in both persons and weapons — represented 10 per cent of global gross domestic product. Such “astounding” financial resources not only corrupted societies and Governments, but threatened international security. Honduras had been a victim to other countries’ insatiable appetite for drugs, and the greed of traffickers in developed countries whose profits were stained with the blood of the innocent. Honduras was neither a consumer, nor producer of drugs. Traffickers came from the global north; but those who died were Honduran. The goal was to defend sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of such challenges. The entry of drugs into Honduras must stop.

For its part, Honduras had updated its regulatory framework and security bodies, he said, and prevention programmes now provided better opportunities for youth. Data from the Independent Observatory on Violence in Honduras showed an 8.5 per cent reduction in homicides this year. Combating organized crime was a shared but differentiated responsibility, and he underscored Colombia and Chile’s cooperation in that regard, as well as the memorandum of understanding between Honduras and the United States. He also lauded the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

In other areas, he said Congress had adopted laws to bolster education. While he defended teachers’ rights to dissent and demonstrate, the young peoples’ right to education should not be subject to any interruption. UNICEF data showed some 600 school days had been lost over the last 10 years, meaning that a student who reached ninth grade had only attained a sixth-grade education. “We are denying opportunities to those who need them the most,” he said, declaring that classrooms were sanctuaries that must never be closed. Equitable growth, coupled with strong education, was the best way to reduce poverty. He cited a cash-transfer programme that had reached 30 per cent of poor families as one response to social exclusion. In sum, he said Honduras was committed to United Nations reform and strengthening its universality based on just, equitable and inclusive representation.

Referring to the theme of the Assembly’s sixty-seventh session, HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBWA, President of Namibia, said that if all people dedicated themselves to finding lasting solutions to conflict by peaceful means, “our collective efforts will be successful”. States should also renew their original commitment to peace and progress as essential values of the United Nations. In that connection, Namibia believed that respect for the sovereign equality of States, territorial integrity and independence constituted the pillars of international law, and, indeed, the “bedrock” of peaceful relations between nations. Any violation of those principles posed a serious threat to international peace and security.

Regional and subregional organizations were important partners in solving conflicts throughout the world, he said, and their contribution to conflict resolution was provided for under the United Nations Charter. There was thus a compelling need for the United Nations to take into account the views of such organizations, including, on the African continent, the African Union Peace and Security Council and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The latter had put in place initiatives to resolve political conflicts in the region through mediation, he said; however, Namibia was concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He urged the international community to support the regional initiative aimed at resolving that conflict and to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced persons.

In Madagascar, he urged political actors to expedite the full implementation of the road map leading to the holding of free, fair, inclusive and credible elections. Namibia also called on Sudan and South Sudan to resolve all outstanding issues peacefully; in the Darfur region, it urged the Government and other parties to find a negotiated peaceful solution to the conflict. He also denounced the unconstitutional changes of government in Mali and in Guinea-Bissau, which took place in March this year. In Somalia, he welcomed the recent positive political developments, including the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as President, and wished him well in the “noble task” of bringing normalcy and stability to Namibia’s sister country. The international community should continue to support the people of Somalia as they embarked upon the path to rebuild their country.

For many decades, the people of Western Sahara had been denied their inalienable right to self-determination and independence. Namibia reiterated its call for the immediate and unconditional implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan leading to the holding of a free and fair referendum. Equally, Namibia wished to reaffirm its unequivocal support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and national independence, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions. In addition, he said, Namibia reiterated its call for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the embargo against Cuba.

Namibia attached great importance to sustainable development and the search for the best ways to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. In that context, it sought the support of Member States to host the Secretariat of the Green Climate Fund in its capital city, Windhoek, which would provide an opportunity for a developing country to host an important United Nations agency. Finally, he said, the reform of the United Nations and its principal organs should aim to strengthen the Organization to make it more efficient, effective and responsible to the needs of all its Members. Strengthening the role and authority of the General Assembly was of paramount importance, as was reform of the Security Council, given its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

PAUL KAGAME, President of Rwanda, said conflicts that distracted nations from development occurred when people were excluded from issues affecting their daily lives. Analysis of political and cultural aspects was the key to finding solutions as there was no “one-size-fit-all” approach and such issues were complex and should be approached as such for the best possible outcome.

The links between conflict and development were often overlooked, he continued, adding that promoting development was a top priority, and the stakes were high. Civil conflict cost about 30 years of growth in GDP, as well as the loss of hard-won development gains. Since neither security nor development could be achieved without the other, everyone had a role to play, from citizens to world leaders to international organizations like the United Nations, he said. Local or regional initiatives yielded more positive results due to their deeper understanding of the issues at hand, and must, therefore, be strengthened.

Reiterating the importance of addressing root causes in tackling challenges, he said that in its 50 years of United Nations membership, his country had been destroyed by political exclusion, as well as genocide. He stressed that it was his obligation to point that out because Rwanda subscribed to the Organization’s founding ideals. The country was committed to a more effective United Nations in its efforts to help create a more just and equitable world. Rwanda would contribute to various development and peace programmes, from its role in promoting the Millennium Development Goals and supporting the Broadband Commission to deploying its troops in peacekeeping missions. Although the challenges appeared daunting, Rwanda was committed to doing more, he said.

EVELINE WIDMER-SCHLUMPF, President of the Swiss Confederation emphasized the importance of consensus in seeking solutions to conflict situations, saying there should be no recourse to the veto in the Security Council, which was difficult to justify in cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. That was why Switzerland and other Member States continued to urge reform of the Council’s working methods, including greater transparency, improved cooperation with other United Nations bodies and more limited use of the veto. Urging all States and peoples to contribute to greater understanding among cultures and creeds, she said freedom of religion or faith must be respected. On the other hand, violent responses to opinions could never be justified, and recent attacks on diplomatic missions were unacceptable and unjustifiable.

While applauding United Nations efforts to expand its mediation and preventive-diplomacy capacity, she said more must be done in that regard as most of the Organization’s budget still went to peacekeeping operations. Greater investment in peaceful means of resolving disputes would pay dividends in the long run, she said, emphasizing that every conflict avoided also prevented human suffering and kept development gains from being rolled back. In the past decade, Switzerland had participated in more than 30 mediation processes in over 20 countries. The country regularly made its knowledge and experts available to the United Nations and wished to see that cooperation intensified, she said. Given the current circumstances, mediation was the best way to respond to political realities.

As the main instrument of preventive diplomacy, special political missions should be reinforced by creating an appropriate budget framework for them, as well as modalities, financing and support, she continued. When attempts at prevention failed, the United Nations must take decisive action. Switzerland had followed with great concern the worsening situation in Syria, she said, noting that human rights law and international humanitarian law were being flouted as she spoke. Innocent thousands had been killed, hundreds of thousands were trapped, and more than 250,000 had sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Gaining access to injured and traumatized victims, unable to leave, was difficult, if not impossible. Noting that 2.5 million people were in urgent need of humanitarian aid, according to estimates by United Nations organizations, she said her country had set aside more than \$15 million for aid to Syria and neighbouring countries.

There would be no security as long as human rights continued to be trampled in the most egregious manner, or as long as those responsible believed they were safe from persecution, she said, stressing that they must be held to account. Impunity for offenders was not just immoral; it also compromised post-reconciliation processes and encouraged history to repeat itself. Noting that Switzerland headed a group of more than 30 countries calling for Syria's referral to the International Criminal Court, she declared: "I call upon you Heads of State and Government present here today, to support this initiative." The international community must be made aware of the extent of human rights violations in Syria.

She said humans were not using the world's available resources in a sustainable manner, preferring to exploit them for short-term gain. The Rio+20 outcome document provided an opportunity to achieve sustainable development and create a green economy. "We must act today so that future generations do not have to pay the price for our inaction", she said, emphasizing the need to overcome the mutual distrust and fear that not everyone would be able to compete on equal terms in the green economy. The Green Climate Fund, which would be a key element in financing restructuring, should be set up without delay in an "optimal environment", she said, citing the availability of Geneva. The transition to the green economy required new approaches, and the common challenge lay in generating prosperity for all without over-exploiting natural resources. In the post-2015 period, everyone could benefit from and build upon the Millennium Development Goals, she said, noting that they provided an opportunity to develop a universal system of targets for the good of future generations. The post-2015 discussions and the Sustainable Development Goals should be combined into a single process.

CRISTINA FERNÁNDEZ, President of Argentina, condemned the recent killing of the United States Ambassador to Libya, characterizing it as terrorism. Noting that there were many interpretations of various events occurring in the Arab world, one of which was known in the Western world as the "Arab Spring", she said the diplomat's death had been no accident and with fundamentalists opposed to peaceful ideas, it was important to understand clearly what had been happening in the region. "Before we choose the language of weapons, we must choose the language of diplomacy", she said. As for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there was a need to recognize Palestine as a State, she said, adding that Israel must accept the 1967 borders. The situation had dragged on for decades without any constructive progress.

On the global economic crisis, she recalled that when her predecessor had addressed the Assembly in 2008, an economic crisis had begun to affect poor people unable to pay off their mortgages. The crisis had spread as a result of actions in wealthy nations that had created the problem. The more recent eurozone crisis was not simply undermining that region, but endangering other parts of the world. Trade wars had erupted around the world, she said, adding that developed countries were the root cause while others took the brunt. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had issued a "threat" to Argentina yesterday, as if issuing a red card in game of football, she said, asserting: "My country is a sovereign nation and is not subject to any threat from outside."

Since the 1980s, the IMF had been unable to carry out its mandate effectively, allowing some countries to sink deeper into debt without oversight, she continued. Addressing the Assembly in 2003, she recalled, her predecessor had appealed to Member States to give Argentina an opportunity to grow. The country had restructured its debts, which had allowed it to spend more on social programmes, which in turn had led to economic growth. She emphasized that over the last 10 years the global economy had been driven by emerging economies like Argentina, which was not accused of protectionism by the countries that had protected their own farmers for many years. Argentina's debt had fallen from 160 per cent of GDP to only 14 per cent today, with creditor countries shouldering the burden of restructuring its debt.

On international territorial disputes, she said 2013 would mark the 180th year of the United Kingdom's illegal usurpation of the Malvinas (Falkland Islands). Many resolutions issued of the General Assembly's Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) and other entities had all asked the United Kingdom to sit down with Argentina for dialogue, but it had refused. She called for the demilitarization of the South Atlantic, pointing out that the international community did not represent multilateralism when permanent members of the Security Council had the right to flout resolutions. The dispute was not a bilateral matter, but a global issue that presented a chance to end colonialism. She also called on Iran to enter into talks with her Government regarding the 1994 terrorist attack in Buenos Aires, proposing a meeting of foreign ministers in

New York on the margins of the general debate. The Argentine Government was prepared to have a trial in a third country to guarantee fairness and justice, she said. Argentina would take a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for 2013-2014 and would make sure to represent every country seeking peace and security.

MACKY SALL, President of Senegal, said organized and heavily armed terrorist groups had illegally occupied two thirds of neighbouring Mali, sowing despair among the population and destroying World Cultural Heritage sites. Northern Mali had become a lawless area, a safe haven for the recruitment and training of international terrorists, who wrongly used Islam as a pretext to disguise their criminal activities and sought to attack foreign interests, as well as reach other parts of the world. He called on the Security Council to end the occupation, authorize action against the terrorist groups, and restore Mali's territorial integrity, "otherwise the Security Council will not have lived up to its responsibilities".

Opposed to any partition of Mali, he also condemned the 22 March 2012 military coup and stressed that "in Africa as elsewhere, the place of the army is in the barracks, under the command of a civilian authority". Turning to the situation in Guinea-Bissau, another neighbouring country, he expressed appreciation for the efforts of the transitional Government to effect national reconciliation, re-establish institutions, organize credible elections and withdraw the army from the political arena. Faced with faithless and lawless foreign drug traffickers, Guinea-Bissau deserved the attention and support of the international community, he stressed.

Speaking as Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, he restated that body's support for the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, saying that "is one of our oldest promises we have not yet fulfilled". In the interest of all peoples of the region and the world, "it is high time that the Holy Land of the three revealed religions no longer be a land of fire, blood and tears, because the light of wisdom emanating from its spiritual calling makes it instead a land of peace and human fraternity".

Describing a "paradox of modern times", he said "never before in human history had the world accumulated so much wealth, but never before in human history has the world counted so many poor". What kind of world did people want "when it is a proven fact that continuous environmental degradation as a result of human action threatens to jeopardize living conditions on earth"? According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates, more than 900 million people suffered undernourishment when agriculture had the potential to feed more than twice the planet's population, he noted.

Meanwhile, millions of human beings in Africa's towns and villages had no access to basic social services and millions of women died in childbirth, he said. At the same time, millions of young people, after years of studies, efforts and sacrifices, only found, instead of accomplished dreams, the nightmare of unemployment and indignation as an outlet for their distress. Millions of workers, fathers and mothers earning the minimum wage, suddenly found themselves out of work because their companies had gone bankrupt and the people responsible had gotten off scot-free with a "golden parachute" as compensation.

Stressing the need to redefine priorities, invest in the economy and agree on a new and fairer world order, he declared: "The African continent, which has endured centuries of slavery and exploitation, cannot afford to [...] give over its resources in a competition that would push it further to the margins of progress and well-being," he said, calling for another way of relating to Africa, one based on a more equitable partnership and which took into account the priorities and interests of all, not only at the United Nations, but also in NEPAD, the Group of Eight (G-8), the G-20 and other forums. Senegal, for its part, would focus on agriculture, infrastructure and energy to ensure a path of progress and improve the lives of its citizens, he said.

JACOB ZUMA, President of South Africa, said the United Nations faced immense pressure to address the unprecedented loss of life in Africa and the Middle East. It was concerning when the Organization appeared unable to act or assist, paralysed in certain instances due to inaction on the part of some Member States, and when a divided Council was unable to muster the collective courage to say "no more" to warring parties in the interest of peace. That illustrated the need to continue and deepen United Nations reform to make the world body agile and nimble in addressing contemporary challenges, he said. Given its mandate, the Council must be legitimate, democratic and transparent, he emphasized.

Calling for more meaningful representation of Africa in that body, he noted that issues affecting the continent accounted for 70 per cent of its agenda. It must be expanded in both membership categories, with at least two permanent seats and five non-permanent ones for Africa. The United Nations should also appreciate fully the role of regional organizations in managing and resolving conflict, he said, urging closer cooperation between the Organization and African Union peace and security mechanisms. He recalled that in January, during its presidency of the Council, South Africa had piloted resolution 2033 (2012), on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security. Through its High-level Implementation Panel on Sudan, the African Union continued to address one of the continent's longest-running conflicts, he pointed out.

In order to settle disputes peacefully, the Council should carry out its Charter mandate within the confines of international law. All Member States and international bodies should be held to account so as to avoid abuse of the "Responsibility to Protect" and the protection of civilians, he said, stressing, however, that such principles must not be used to justify regime change. Debate on those principles must continue in order to develop norms and standards of accountability, he said, emphasizing also that the United Nations must maintain its impartiality and not be dragged into taking sides in a conflict under the guise of civilian protection.

Turning to the Middle East, he expressed concern about the Palestine-Israeli conflict, saying his country remained committed to a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, and fully supported Palestine's application for United Nations membership. It was unacceptable that Palestine remained outside the Organization, he said, calling for the matter to be concluded soon in a positive way. As for Iran, he noted that the Director General of IAEA had concluded that all declared material in that country was for peaceful purposes, and encouraged Iran to continue cooperating with the Agency. South Africa supported the long-standing call for a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East, and a peaceful resolution of issues relating to Iran's nuclear programme was important in that regard. He reiterated South Africa's continuing support for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, as well as for lifting the embargo against Cuba.

He urged the United Nations to continue promoting the Millennium Development Goals and instruments meant to advance women's human rights. Expressing concern that sub-Saharan Africa would likely not meet the targets, he called for expediting their implementation in the next three years, and appealed to donors not to renege on their commitments to help Africa attain the Goals. Noting that racism and racial discrimination remained an affront to the founding principles of the United Nations, he called for renewing the global commitment to building on the solid foundation laid by the Durban Declaration and Action Plan. Additionally, Member States must ensure implementation of the agreements reached during the Conference of Parties on climate change, held in South Africa last December, he said, emphasizing that the Durban Platform offered an opportunity to move forward in that regard.

RICARDO MARTINELLI BERROCAL, President of Panama, said his country advocated the peaceful resolution of all international conflicts through multilateral organizations and using tools such as mediation, cooperation and dialogue. The search for those tools must involve legitimate representatives of the parties to a conflict, who must make efforts to recognize the rights of their counterparts while complying with their own obligations to reach just and permanent solutions. For that reason, Panama considered that Palestine had the right to be recognized as a national State, but must solve its differences with Israel, he said. Expressing concern over violence in the Middle East and the severe crisis in Syria, he reminded all parties concerned that a peaceful solution was the only acceptable means to achieve a just and permanent solution. He condemned the killing of the United States Ambassador to Libya and recent attacks against diplomatic premises belonging to France, Germany, Israel, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, United States and Turkey.

Describing education as one of the great keys of conflict resolution, he said: "Education not only sets us free, it makes us free thinkers. It helps us understand and respect different ideas." Access to information through the Internet and social networks was an indispensable condition for elevating the level of knowledge among all populations. "A well-educated child today ensures healthy and peaceful coexistence for our nations tomorrow," he said. "Without education, there is no possibility of dialogue and vice versa." Yet he expressed concern about the risks to which the misuse of cyberspace could expose children and teenagers, and stressed his country's support for the International Telecommunications Union's efforts in that regard. "Let us harness information and communications technologies for the benefit of development and for a better quality of life for our infants," he said.

Panama offered a contribution to the international community and the United Nations via two large-scale projects, he said. The first was the United Nations Regional Hub for Latin American and the Caribbean, which would host 16 regional and subregional offices of the world body and contribute to its operational processes, as outlined in the Delivering as One document. The other project was the Regional Humanitarian Assistance Logistics Centre for the Americas, intended to deliver aid in the event of disasters in the region. Panama's economy had moved up nine places, from 49 to 40, in 2011-2012, according to the Global Competitiveness Index, demonstrating the greatest growth in Latin America, and allowing the country significantly to reduce unemployment and extreme poverty without compromising the richness of its environment. Panama would keep advocating for an institutional multilateral structure that would reinforce the right of all peoples to a planet with an environment that allowed the development of a healthy and peaceful life, he said. "There is still time to share as brothers and sisters the feast of our existence in a peaceful planet that belongs to us all."

ABDULLAH II, King of Jordan, welcomed world leaders of many religions who had stood with Muslims worldwide in rejecting provocations meant to divide those of different faiths. He condemned all acts vilifying the Prophet Muhammad or falsely using his name — or that of Islam — to justify violence. "There are no sidelines on this issue," he stressed. Every faith everywhere must be proactive in promoting understanding, he said, adding that the first four words of the United Nations Charter — "To unite our strength" — were not just an old dream, but "a modern urgency". The United Nations was needed as never before.

He said important tasks ahead in the Middle East involved providing better opportunities, especially for young people, averting regional instability and fulfilling the basic human right to live in freedom, dignity, justice and peace. Jordan, for its part, was guided by mutual respect and moderation in its “Arab Spring” journey to accelerate home-grown reforms and achieve national goals. Since 2011, constitutional amendments and new laws had created a matrix of institutions and principles that supported democratization, he said, adding that Jordan would have a new Parliament next year.

Turning to the tragic situation in Syria, he said the violence must end immediately and a transition must begin now. There was no alternative to a political solution that would end the bloodshed, restore security and preserve both Syria’s territorial integrity and the dignity of its people. Jordan would support the new Special Representative of the Arab League and the United Nations. More than 200,000 Syrians had sought refuge in Jordan since the beginning of the crisis, and while that had put pressure on its economy, the country would continue to shoulder that responsibility, he said, adding that international support was essential.

As for the crisis at the heart of the region, he said Palestinians had been the exception to the United Nations promise of shelter under international law, the dignity of living in freedom and security, and the right to self-determination. No issue stirred more anger than telling an entire people that they did not count when it came to global justice. The “Arab Summer” could not bear its full fruit until the Palestinian-Israeli conflict ended with a just peace and a Palestinian State, living side-by-side with a secure Israel. Illegal settlement-building and unilateral actions threatened a negotiated peace. Jordan was also extremely concerned about threats to Jerusalem and the sanctity of its Muslim and Christian holy sites.

With Al-Aqsa Mosque and Compound under Hashemite custodianship and protected by international law as occupied territory, he warned, any invasion or division of Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa would be viewed not only as a breach of Israel’s obligations, but as a profound religious transgression. A clear message must be sent that such actions would not be tolerated. The world could not afford continuing hostility. There was a potential opportunity after elections in the United States to achieve a solution that would see two States at peace — Palestine and Israel — secure and free to look forward on the basis of a just, comprehensive and final settlement. “The Arab world is seeking peace, real peace”, involving diplomatic and economic relations, and a new normality wherein people would be safe in their homes. That prospect had been on offer since 2002 under the Arab Peace Initiative, through which 57 Arab and Muslim countries had reached out to Israel, he noted, emphasizing that it was time for Israel to turn around and make peace with the Palestinians. Almost three generations after the creation of the United Nations, it was not enough simply to make the right choices. “We must also pursue effective action.”

JÁNOS ÁDER, President of Hungary, said the rule of law was an important matter, as his country had belonged to the communist-socialist bloc for “long decades”. In 1949, four years after the end of the Second World War, the communist takeover had been completed and the multiparty system eliminated. Most party leaders had been forced into exile or imprisoned, he said, adding that, born 10 years later, he had spent his early adult years in a dictatorship. That generation, like that of their parents, had been deprived of human rights.

The 1980s had brought the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, as well as democratic changes to Hungary, with free elections held in the spring of 1990, he continued. In April 2011, the National Assembly had adopted the Fundamental Law, the youngest Constitution in Europe, which incorporated almost all elements of the European Charter of Human Rights. A new element — constitutional constraints — had been imposed to curb irresponsible public spending and reckless increases in State debt. It also provided guarantees on fulfilling international legal obligations and complying with international law, he said, adding that numerous provisions related to basic rights.

Turning to the issue of water and sanitation, he said 90 per cent of all communal wastewater and 70 per cent of industrial wastewater in the developing world was discharged into rivers without treatment. The chemical revolution of the post-Second World War period had also had serious adverse environmental implications. There was not enough water to meet daily consumption needs. The need to manage water made international cooperation indispensable, since half the world’s people lived in “shared” or “joint” water-catchment areas. The same river was expected to provide water for two or more countries, he said, adding that the stakes were also high in agriculture if the sector wished to produce enough food for another 2.5 billion people by 2050. Hungary viewed water and sanitation as among the most important questions of the twenty-first century, he said, noting that his country had participated in the Friends of Water Working Group created under United Nations auspices. Hungary was ready and willing to share its experience with others, and welcomed all interested parties to the conference on water and sanitation to be held next year in Budapest.

ASIF ALI ZARDARI, President of Pakistan, said his country had gone above and beyond the call of duty in fulfilling its international responsibilities. It had consistently been among the top contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations for many years, and today, more than 10,000 of its forces wore the blue helmets in the service of people around the world. Furthermore, Pakistan’s election to the Security

Council reflected its commitment to world peace and security, as well as the international community's vote of confidence. The United Nations represented common aspirations for peace and development, but it needed reform, he said. It must become more democratic and accountable. The legitimate aspirations of any people should be accommodated peacefully and in a manner consistent with sovereignty and territorial integrity, he said, adding that Pakistan supported the right of the Palestinian people to an independent State and to the admission of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations.

He recalled the loss of more than 7,000 soldiers and policemen, over 37,000 civilians, and several Government officials, including Pakistan's first elected female Prime Minister and his wife, Benazir Bhutto, to extremism. Terrorism and extremism had destroyed human lives, torn the country's social fabric, and devastated its economy, he said, adding that he was present not to answer, but to ask questions on behalf of his people whose lives had been lost to terrorism. Turning to Afghanistan, he said Pakistan's doors had been open to its Afghan brothers and sisters but it had been left to fend for itself and its Afghan guests. Recalling the dictatorial regimes that were responsible for suffocating and throttling Pakistan, its institutions and its democracy, he called attention to the judicial execution of Pakistan's first elected leader, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the jailing of other elected leaders, the 12 years he had himself spent in prison, and the billions provided by the international community to support those dictatorships.

The country's social fabric and its very character had been altered, he said, adding that "our condition today is a product of dictatorships". No country and no people had suffered more than Pakistan in the struggle against terrorism. How much more suffering could it endure? Describing how democracy had brought about major changes in his country, he listed the completion of a full five-year term by the first civilian Government in Pakistan's 66-year history; the passage of unprecedented reforms by Parliament; the restoration of the 1973 consensus Constitution; and the establishment of the National Commission on Women, the National Commission on Human Rights, and a truly Independent Election Commission to ensure free, fair and transparent elections. The media were free and uncensored and civil society was flourishing under the protection of democracy, he said. Millions of families had also benefited from the Benazir Income Support Programme, the first social safety net created with the support of Pakistani women, for the weak and less privileged. It had not only helped the poor, but also empowered women in their households, he said.

As evidence of its cooperation with other countries in the region, he said Pakistan had begun to engage at all levels of the Afghan political spectrum. Believing in a sovereign, stable and secure Afghanistan, he said "what is good for the Afghan people is good for Pakistan". He stressed the need for the international community to support the 3 million Afghan refugees in his country, so they could return home with dignity. Similarly, Pakistan's relations with India, based on mutual trust and communication, were growing, he said, adding that he had been encouraged by his discussions with the Prime Minister of India, with whom he had met last month in Tehran — their fifth meeting in four years. On the territorial dispute between the two countries, he stressed Pakistan's continuing support for the right of the people of Jammu and Kashmir peacefully to choose their destiny, in accordance with the Security Council's long-standing resolutions on that matter. Kashmir remained a symbol of the failures of the United Nations system rather than its strengths, he said, emphasizing that the resolution of those issues could only be reached in an environment of cooperation. To further build regional cooperation, Pakistan would be hosting a quadrilateral summit next month, and signing the Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, he said.

CARLOS MAURICIO FUNES CARTAGENA, President of El Salvador, said some political forces, leaders, intellectuals and the media continued to look at the world through cold war eyes, as if the last half century had not wrought strong changes in the global political arena. Such attitudes impeded efforts to strengthen democracy, he said, describing his country as a clear example of contradictions between rule-of-law processes and the persistence of conservative forces still advocating communism. While the country was a fine example of conflict resolution through dialogue, it also embodied structures firmly anchored in the past and in the cold war.

The country's emergence from a 12-year-long civil war was an example of how efficient dialogue and negotiation could be, he said, pointing to the 1992 peace accords. The United Nations had acted as a mediator in that conflict, after which Salvadorans had begun a new process of slowly consolidating democracy and creating modern institutions. Three years ago, El Salvador had lived through another landmark period in its quest to strengthen democracy. After 20 years of one-party rule, a change in administration had opened the doors to true democracy. The Government had changed the rules of the game, guaranteed judicial security, eliminated privileges granted under previous administrations, and pardoned crimes committed by State agents during the war.

But not long ago, the country began to suffer an institutional crisis between the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber and the Legislative Assembly that tested the solidity of democracy, he said. That conflict, which lasted five months, arose from different conflicting interpretations of the Constitution. The lack of agreement between the parties was referred to the Central American Court of Justice. After 17 days of deliberations, an agreement finally was reached, which led to the appointment of a new Supreme Court of

Justice and the normal functioning of the country's judiciary. El Salvador successfully settled an institutional conflict through dialogue that in other areas would have led to a coup d'état.

The strengthening of democratic processes should bring about deep changes in nations' socioeconomic structures, he said. That clearly should come within the framework of the rule of law. Marginalization of communities and their exclusion from progress could not be tolerated. The phenomenon of migration was an errant reflection of the need to change quickly. Latin America had taken important steps in that direction and today it was aware that no model was successful if it left the great majority of people on the margins. Everyone must be involved and reap the benefits if a socioeconomic model was to be successful. The unequal distribution of goods and wealth, climate change, and the lack of global control over financial flows led to reoccurring crises. That must change.

He stressed the need to ensure public security and fight organized crime, noting that his country was today the region's focus in that regard. Once the second most violent country in Central America, with on average of 15 murders a day, it now had on average 3.8 murders a day. Over the last three years, El Salvador had adopted a policy of public security, with the Catholic Church acting as intermediary. In order for violence and organized crime to disappear, the situation of youth without hope or opportunity must change, he stressed. Without the strong support of narcotics-consuming countries, the war against drugs could not be won, he warned. Central American nations, alongside Mexico and Colombia, had taken on that battle, he said, calling on the United States to join them.

JOSEPH KABILA KABANGE, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, described the general debate as an opportunity for Member States to participate in collective reflection on efforts made for peace, security and development. The Assembly President had recommended that the debate focus on "the adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means", a wise choice and a relevant theme in light of the international community's tireless search for peace through means other than force.

While history taught that such solutions were possible, dialogue must be based on truth, he said, stressing the need to guard against hasty action. More than 60 years after the creation of the United Nations, the world today still saw many wars, as well as instability. Terrorism was not decreasing, but increasing, with the Middle East a focus of attention. Syria was in bloodshed and Mali was plagued by separatism. Peace was more than the absence of war, he said, pointing out that numerous people were engaging in the trafficking of drugs and human beings and other violations, instead of working for prosperity. For the sake of two thirds of humanity, there was an urgent need to eradicate poverty, ignorance, violence, injustice and diseases such as HIV and malaria, he emphasized.

He said that after years of difficulty, his country was involved in the consolidation of peace and security. No effort had been spared, including the establishment of the rule of law. All efforts under way proved his Government's commitment to peace and stability. But that momentum was now threatened by forces opposed to peace, he said. In North Kivu Province, where peace and stability, as well as reconciliation and human dignity, had begun to take hold, women, children and men were now subjected to inhuman acts, falling victim to profound evil and the philosophy of might. Children were stripped of the rights to attend school, he said. The situation was not acceptable and should be met with sanctions, he said, stressing the important role of the Security Council in that regard. "It is up to us to defend our country and law and order throughout the national territory", he said, adding that the Government was mobilizing the necessary human and financial resources at the sacrifice of the nation's emergence. "The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a safe investment", he declared, urging bilateral and multilateral partners to continue investing in his country.

ALI BONGO ONDIMBA, President of Gabon, expressed hope that the efforts of the Special Representative for Syria would help stop the ongoing violence in Syria and lead to dialogue. Turning to Mali, he condemned attempts to partition the country and the destruction of its World Heritage Sites. Expressing support for the African Union's efforts in trying to re-establish Mali's territorial integrity, he called on the Security Council and Member States to support a United Nations strategy for the Sahel region that would take security, governance, development, human rights and humanitarian aspects into account.

He recalled that while a member of the Security Council, his country had joined others in responding to the call of the Libyan people. The United Nations should take action to restore peace and rebuild that nation, he said, reiterating condemnation of the attack on the United States consulate in Benghazi. He called for continued support for the Democratic Republic of Congo in the security, political and humanitarian spheres. Gabon also welcomed the adoption of Somalia's provisional constitution, as well as the election of its new President, he said, adding that his Government remained committed to working with that country as it had done in the past. Through cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union, security in Somalia had improved well beyond Mogadishu, he noted.

The conflicts which continued to destabilize the world, he said, are a reflection of people's aspirations for peace and security, justice, development and sovereign equality of States. Those aspirations are equally

of the people of Palestine and the people of Cuba, he said. The Palestinians wished for peace and security alongside its neighbours with secure and internationally recognized borders, while Cuba wished for a lifting of an economic embargo which had been hurting it commercially and financially.

Emphasizing that regional integration was a means to mutual economic development, he described efforts in Central Africa to put confidence-building measures in place, including the rapid alert mechanism, with the support of the regional bureau of the United Nations. Turning to Gabon in particular, he described efforts to turn it into an emerging market country by 2025 through the construction of strategic infrastructure, strengthening the rule of law and effecting various social, political and economic reforms. To diversify the economy and create jobs and wealth, Gabon was also working to develop its export market. Regarding support for sustainable forests, natural resources and biodiversity, he said Gabon remained committed to fighting the smuggling of protected species.

IVAN GAŠPAROVIČ, President of Slovakia, called for global partnership and cooperation, strong multilateralism and a United Nations capable of effectively combining its political, economic, military, social, civil, trade and development dimensions. The world needed an Organization that people could trust. Condemning as unacceptable the recent attacks against diplomats and diplomatic missions, he said such violence could never be a means to resolve disputes. Open dialogue, respect for mutual differences and the joint search for peaceful solutions was the only way to go, he said, adding that mediation under United Nations auspices was the key to resolving conflicts. Unfair distribution of wealth, social imbalances, poverty and a sense of injustice bred conflicts and disputes, while prevention was the most effective tool for ensuring peace, a dignified life and sustainable growth.

It was crucial to remove the primary causes of conflict, including through poverty reduction, sustainable development, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as well as democratic institutions and arms control, he said. The United Nations must be adequately empowered to use its potential to help Member States in those areas. The strongest economies must be stable and aware of their responsibility to help achieve global development and social stability around the world. The international community must, therefore, pursue the common goal of transforming the United Nations into an effective institution with a leading role in a new global environment and a clear vision on adapting to the demands of the twenty-first century. The world body had the tools needed to end poverty and ensure sustainable development for all, he said. At a time of fiscal constraints, existing tools must be used more effectively, and there was no need to create new parallel or duplicate structures.

Expressing support for the Secretary-General's "Sustainable Energy for All" initiative, he stressed the positive aspects of using nuclear energy in the energy and health-care sectors. Priority investment in research to increase the operational safety and security of nuclear power plants was more useful than massive investment in closing functioning power plants. Slovakia was prepared to cooperate with other partners to make the United Nations more effective, he said, expressing support for strengthening the Economic and Social Council and making it work more effectively with the Assembly and other actors of the United Nations system. Slovakia also took seriously its moral duty to help developing countries and countries in distress, he said, adding that, despite its tight budget, his country had increased its official development assistance (ODA) this year.

Slovakia also advocated a comprehensive, universal and binding arms trade treaty, he said, adding that further negotiations would lead to consensus on an effective agreement. Applauding the convening of the upcoming Helsinki conference on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, he said its successful conclusion would support efforts to end concerns over Iran's nuclear programme, he said. However, Iran's rocket testing did not contribute to a belief in the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. Slovakia supported strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to manage crises. There was also a need for greater cooperation among the Organization's peacekeeping missions, better protection of civilians through security-sector reform, and for better strategies to move from peacekeeping to peacebuilding.

Afghanistan remained a top foreign military priority for Slovakia, which would keep its troops in that country as long as necessary, he said. It was one of the top three recipients of Slovakia's ODA, he said, adding that his country also supported the central role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in building capacity and stability. Wherever in the world human lives were at risk, the international community should be prepared to take resolute action, he said, expressing his deepest regret over the thousands of victims in Syria, and joining previous speakers in requesting the International Criminal Court to investigate the most serious crimes committed in that country.

GOODLUCK EBELE JONATHAN, President of Nigeria, said the world was witnessing important and dramatic changes. The Arab Spring was setting new social contracts between Governments and the governed; South Sudan had gained independence, with some setbacks; and the situation in Syria continued to weigh on the collective conscience. Nigeria was ready to work with other countries to make civilian protection in conflict situations a United Nations priority. Nigeria's 2010-2011 Security Council membership had allowed

it to work with others in promoting the peace and security agenda, he said, urging recommitment to the long-overdue reform of that body so as to make it more equitable, inclusive and effective. With expanded permanent membership, the Council would benefit from the unique experience of regional representatives.

He said his Government's response to extremist threats and militant activities sought to address their root causes and explore opportunities for dialogue. Nigeria had signed bilateral agreements with Cameroon, Niger and Chad, while the Lake Chad Basin Commission provided an excellent platform for multilateral cooperation. Such measures would stem the flow of small arms and light weapons. However, one issue deserving attention was the adoption of a legally binding arms trade treaty, he said. Such an instrument could regulate the transfer of conventional weapons and curb the illicit small-arms trade. The absence of a global consensus on controlling such weapons fuelled conflict and hampered growth.

Turning to peace and security matters, he underscored his country's commitment to fostering regional and international peace and security, in close collaboration with the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS. The subregion had suffered some setbacks, with the political crisis in Mali stemming from unconstitutional governmental change and the emergence of insurgency. The Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau, headed by Nigeria, had worked to establish a transitional Government that would restore political and constitutional order. "West Africa can ill afford renewed insurgency", he cautioned, pressing the United Nations and others urgently to build upon recent gains to secure peace across the subregion.

For its own part, he said, Nigeria had played a crucial role in all recent developments on the continent, including the struggle for independence and self-determination, the fight against apartheid, colonialism and discrimination. The country was in the vanguard of the fight against extremism and terrorism, and remained unflinching in its resolve to protect its citizens. However, it needed international collaboration, he said, urging all like-minded stakeholders to address such issues with the seriousness they deserved. Nigeria would strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations in peacekeeping and ensure its continuing contribution to present and future operations.

CHRISTOPHER JOREBON LOEAK, President of the Marshall Islands, said his country had been born first in the hearts and minds of the Marshallese people, but its nationhood had been forged under the auspices of the United Nations. Its unique story deserved reflection, two decades after becoming a United Nations Member State and leaving the Organization's trusteeship. Since 1954, Marshallese leaders had visited the United Nations to address the ongoing impacts of the 67 nuclear tests conducted on their nation's land while still under United Nations trusteeship, he recalled, describing the matter as a foreign policy issue and more than a mere historical legacy; it was a contemporary reality for local communities. The United Nations had authorized many of those tests through two resolutions adopted in 1954 and 1956, which also made assurances of basic human rights. While acknowledging the important efforts made to date, "half-lives of radioactive material remain for generations, and much more remains to be done", he said.

Today, however, for the first time since the trusteeship resolution of 1956, the United Nations had finally spoken, he said. Earlier this month, the Special Rapporteur on toxic waste, had presented his report to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva regarding the nuclear-testing programme in the Marshall Islands. It presented significant findings that the pain, mistrust, progress and failures of the Marshallese people over decades had a human-rights dimension, and that the international community must respond with more than silence. "The Marshallese people have paid too heavy a price for the only instance in which the United Nations explicitly authorized the use of nuclear weapons", he said, urging the United States and the wider international community to join in welcoming the report's specific recommendations.

Noting perhaps the most complex challenges posed by climate adaptation to a low-lying nation, he said there was a need to overcome them nonetheless. Efforts in that regard should not rely on an uncertain global climate architecture because the continued survival of the Marshallese people was at stake. The large scale of the future Green Climate Fund — up to \$100 billion a year — and other efforts could easily overlook the relatively modest needs of the Marshall Islands. The United Nations should not fail the most vulnerable nations, and it must better capture the efforts of all necessary actors, he continued.

He went on to urge other Member States to advance the meaningful participation of Taiwan within the United Nations system and the international community. Building on the successful efforts of the World Health Assembly, Taiwan's participation as an observer should be accepted within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), he said. The international community should also recognize the strong efforts, and further potential, for Taiwan to help the world meet the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, the international community must not fail to act on the most immediate security concerns, he said, recalling that recent tension in the broader Pacific Rim, including the East China Sea, should be addressed through an inclusive dialogue involving all key actors.

SPRENT ARUMOGO DABWIDO, President of Nauru, said unfulfilled promises stretched back decades, with multilateralism degrading in many ways into a scramble for finite resources and a fight for a bigger piece of the economic pie, sugar-coated with empty rhetoric. International agreements contained

reaffirmation after reiteration of non-binding commitments to live up to lofty ideas. Perhaps their greatest value was as a reminder of how little had been achieved, he said. "Our words must have meaning if our multilateral institutions are to remain effective in addressing our emerging global challenges."

That dynamic could not be more evident than in climate-change negotiations, he continued, noting the terrifying news that Arctic Sea ice had dropped to its lowest level in recorded history. A growing number of studies were concluding that the window on limiting temperature rise to even 2° Celsius was rapidly closing, while greenhouse-gas emissions climbed higher each year with no end in sight. Rather than increasing the urgency of the response, there had instead been efforts to delay action until 2020. For multilateralism to be credible, those countries with the greatest capacity must immediately start to remake the energy infrastructure by reprioritizing their pre-2020 mitigation ambitions and mobilizing the necessary finance, technology and capacity-building measures.

States must realize that the atmosphere was so polluted that many dangerous climate-change impacts were unavoidable, he continued, urging the United Nations to address the related security implications. Indeed, climate change would become a bigger driver of conflict in the future unless steps were taken to prepare. While scepticism about the Security Council's involvement in climate-change discussions was understandable as that body did not reflect the diversity of United Nations membership, the time had come to remedy the issue. Reform must provide a forum for addressing the security challenges of all countries, not just the most powerful.

Turning to sustainable development efforts, which had also been "graced" with an abundance of "lofty rhetoric", he pointed out that healthy marine ecosystems were vital to the sustainable livelihoods of small islands. Fishing was not just another economic sector; it was often the only significant one and must be jealously guarded. While the Rio+20 outcome contained few concrete deliverables, it did capture the Pacific small island developing States' vision of a "blue economy", which, if implemented, could help stem the decline in fish stocks. He also urged support for the Third Global Conference on Small Island Developing States, to be held in the Pacific in 2014. In closing, he invited support for continuing dialogue between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, and encouraged the parties to the East China Sea dispute to recognize Taiwan's "positive role in consolidating peace and stability in East Asia". He also called for a peaceful settlement of the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and acknowledged Palestine's right to statehood as part of a peaceful two-State solution.

VÁCLAV KLAUS, President of the Czech Republic, said international disputes and conflicts could and should be settled by peaceful rather than military means, which had been demonstrated for a long time. During the emotionally straining and painful division of Czechoslovakia in the 1990s, peaceful means and diplomatic negotiations undertaken by domestic representatives had resulted in a settlement and a positive solution, he recalled. "Our experience confirms that it is in particular the domestic politicians who should be the driving force of talks rather than international negotiation teams or former political celebrities." The mandate of negotiating parties must be rooted in domestic conditions and local traditions, and external observers must not succumb to the temptation of imposing a settlement that they themselves regard as being the right one.

"Those inevitable preconditions are often not met in various attempts at peaceful conflict resolution, and it is, therefore, no wonder that we often see the results opposite to what the architects of a particular settlement would have wished," he said. "We have to ask ourselves: what is the success of peace talks and international missions?" he asked. "Do external interventions improve the situation or do they rather make it worse by hindering spontaneous processes that could reintroduce stability in the region, possibly with smaller sacrifices compared to the price paid by the external intervention? Are, for instance, the developments in Iraq, the still-open Cyprus issue or the independence of Kosovo a success of the United Nations or not?"

He said that the Czech Republic, as a country with fresh experience of a transition to democracy, wished Syria would take the same path, but added that he did not see a feasible solution at present. Immediate efforts must focus on helping the people affected by the current tragic situation. The Czech Republic had already sent humanitarian aid, set up a medical-evacuation programme for refugees, taken part in a United Nations observer mission and accepted a request from the United States for representation in diplomatic and consular matters in Syria, he said. What was needed now was a broader, longer-term perspective that identified what needed to be done tomorrow and the day after. "I am afraid that this is the most important lesson learned from the military intervention in Libya, which clearly demonstrated that a stable settlement cannot be sought by military force," he noted.

HAMID KARZAI, President of Afghanistan, said the world was being shaken by the depravity of fanatics who had insulted the faith of more than 1.5 billion Muslims. Strongly condemning those acts, whether they involved the production of a film or the publication of cartoons, he said they could never be justified as freedom of speech or expression, and nor could they provide a reason for genuine protests to be used as a pretext to incite violence and chaos entailing the terrible loss of innocent lives. Islamophobia was a worrying

phenomenon that threatened peaceful coexistence among cultures and civilizations, he said, calling upon politicians and media in the West to confront all its many forms and manifestations.

"It is incumbent on us all to advance the cause of dialogue and cooperation, to fight the forces of division and hatred and to fulfil the promise of a better and brighter future for coming generations," he emphasized. "We must work to defeat the protagonists of the conflict of civilizations and support the voices of tolerance and understanding." Afghanistan was a testament to the benefits of multilateral cooperation and international solidarity, he said, recalling that a decade ago, the country had been decimated in all respects. Now democracy had taken root, and health services and education were accessible in all corners of the country.

However, those accomplishments had not come easy and the world's fight against terrorism had continued unabated, with the Afghan people paying the biggest price any nation had paid in life and treasure, he said. "Terrorism is not rooted in Afghan villages and towns — it never was," he said. "Its sources and its support networks all exist beyond Afghanistan's borders. Therefore, while the international community's security is being safeguarded from the threat of terrorism, the people of Afghanistan must no longer be made to pay the price and endure the brunt of the war."

Today, Afghanistan was pursuing the cause of peace and an end to violence, he continued. Convinced that military force alone was not an adequate strategy to bring about security, he said the peace and reconciliation process aimed to bring all elements of the armed opposition to peaceful lives in society. Recalling the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, Chairman of the High Peace Council, he said he was proud that the professor's son, Salahuddin Rabbani, had stepped in to lead the Council as part of the delegation in New York. He added that his "hand of peace and reconciliation" remained extended not only to the Taliban, but to all other opposition groups wishing to return to dignified, peaceful and independent lives in their homeland.

"What we ask of them in return is simple: an end to violence; cutting ties with terrorist networks; preserving the valuable gains of the past decade; and respecting our Constitution," he continued. Further necessary actions included requesting the Security Council's Taliban Sanctions Committee to take more active delisting measures, engaging in close dialogue with Pakistan and giving national priority to the assumption of full security responsibility by Afghanistan's own forces. Consolidating international commitment and partnership had resulted in a long-term training commitment from NATO and other partners, he said, adding that the Istanbul Process had presented a new agenda across the region. He concluded by welcoming the appointment of Lakhdar Brahimi as the new Joint Special Representative for Syria, and expressed Afghanistan's support for the Palestinian people's right to an independent State.

EDWARD KIWANUKA SSEKANDI, Vice-President of Uganda, said that when national actors failed to resolve problems, the subregional organizations should step in. In the case of Africa, those bodies included the East African Community, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, SADC, and ECOWAS, among others. The United Nations and the international community should then provide the necessary support to subregional and regional initiatives. Recent achievements in the Burundi, Sudan-South Sudan, and Somalia peace processes attested to the progress achievable by working together.

On the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, he urged the Security Council and the international community to provide the necessary support for the decisions taken at the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region in Kampala earlier this month. That initiative had been aimed at addressing the root causes of the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo through the deployment of a neutral international force. It had also been a response to the humanitarian crisis in that country, he added. External interventions often contributed to a cycle of destabilization, a reason for situations like the one in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, he noted. Uganda's contribution to conflict-resolution in the subregion, the wider African continent and on the international scene was guided by that approach, which had proven largely successful in resolving conflicts, he said.

There was no doubt that resolving conflicts required identifying and addressing their underlying causes, which included social, political and economic factors that were often deeply entrenched and interwoven, he continued. In seeking to resolve any conflict, national, regional and international actors must adopt approaches that kept such complexities in mind. First, it was important to address the substantive issues giving rise to conflict in the first place, such as lack of access to or equitable distribution of resources, social or political exclusion and other grievances. The linkage between development and security in peacebuilding was now widely recognized, and once conflicts were resolved, the affected communities needed peace dividends in terms of delivery of basic services such as health and education, as well as employment opportunities.

Secondly, efforts should be made to defuse the fear, hatred and other negative emotions that made conflicts intractable and often violent. "We must collectively speak out against intolerance and extremism in

order to advance mutual respect and understanding of the values and beliefs of others,” he said. Uganda condemned all acts of terrorism and violence, including the recent incident targeting diplomatic missions of the United States and other Member States. Third, political leaders and all actors needed to forge national reconciliation, including through transitional-justice mechanisms, in addition to establishing truth and reconciliation mechanisms that could play a key role in promoting durable peace. He also stressed the need to increase the role of women and youth in the peaceful settlement of disputes, given the significant contribution they could make. On the Israeli-Palestinian question, he said Uganda continued to call upon both parties to negotiate a peaceful settlement based on a two-State solution.

MARIANO RAJOY BREY, Prime Minister of Spain, said his country wished to serve on the Security Council in 2015-2016, noting that its experience in making the difficult but successful transition to democracy could be useful to all Arab countries currently in a similar situation. In the process of building open, inclusive societies, there was no room for movements that promoted violence, he said. In 2011, Spain had worked to find solutions to crises in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia, he recalled. Its cooperation in the fight against piracy in the Indian Ocean was greater than ever, and during Spain’s recent presidency of the Contact Group on piracy off the Somali coast, progress in creating an international response and humanitarian efforts had led to improvements in the region.

He went on to say that four months ago, Spain had signed an agreement with the World Food Programme (WFP) to create the world’s largest food storage facility in the Canary Islands, which would allow faster, more efficient delivery of emergency food aid in Africa. By contributing resources, infrastructure and personnel, Spain had helped Afghanistan move towards stability, and would continue to help that country achieve development and security. Spain had also committed to the Millennium Development Goals since their inception, having donated almost \$1 billion through the Spain-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund, the largest donation to a cooperation programme in the country’s history.

Emphasizing the valuable and increasing role of Latin America in developing the multilateral system, he said his country would host the 2012 Ibero-American Summit in Cadiz. He reiterated his appeal for an end to all violence in Syria and called upon that country’s President to allow a political process that would enable a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Lebanon had managed to stay out of the spiral of violence in Syria, thanks in part to support from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), in which Spain was an active participant, he noted. Spain supported a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he stressed, adding that the global community must have the courage to take the necessary steps to ensure a just, durable peace in response to the yearnings of both sides.

Noting that he would participate in Wednesday’s Sahel Summit at Headquarters, he firmly condemned the violence in northern Mali and expressed support for the efforts of the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS to find a solution. He also reiterated his appeal to Iran to ensure compliance with the resolutions set forth by the E3+3 Group in relation to its nuclear-enrichment activities without delay, and to ratify and adhere to the Additional Protocol to the Comprehensive Safeguard Agreement with the IAEA. Spain also supported the Six-Party Talks, he said, adding that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea must end its nuclear military activities in a complete and verifiable way.

Spain’s desire to serve on the Council again reflected its conviction that it could continue to play an active role in finding joint solutions to common problems through its demonstrated commitment to multilateralism, he said. It would continue contributing to peacekeeping operations, providing troops through the United Nations support base in Quart de Poblet. He called for reactivating the Conference on Disarmament and renewing the Assembly’s mandate to advance negotiations on an arms trade treaty. Spain would continue to support negotiations on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism, he said, recalling that his country had hosted a high-level conference on victims of terrorism in Madrid last July.

A firm defender of peaceful solutions to conflict, he said that Spain, together with Morocco, would present an initiative to promote mediation and develop national and local capacities in the Mediterranean, in line with Assembly resolution 65/283, the Secretary-General’s work and that of the Group of Friends of Mediation. Spain actively supported a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the dispute over Western Sahara, he said, adding that as a member of the Group of Friends, his country firmly supported the work of the Secretary-General, his Personal Envoy and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). He also called upon the United Kingdom to renew its bilateral dialogue with Spain over the decolonization of Gibraltar, in line with United Nations parameters.

KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO, Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, said that, after overcoming the main obstacles of state-building, his country now looked to the future with optimism. The Government programme for 2012-2017, which outlined short-, medium- and long-term objectives, had been endorsed by Parliament. “Today we have a plan, a vision and a goal to transform Timor-Leste from a low-income country to a medium-high-income country by 2030”, he said, adding that “we want to be a prosperous and safe nation, with a healthy and educated population and with skilled employment for all”. However, in the short term, Timor-Leste

would not meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, he said, adding that its current major challenge was the fight against poverty — a challenge facing “over 1 billion people in our planet”. Regrettably, around 20 per cent of the world’s population lived in conditions of extreme poverty and hunger, and the lack of access to water sources would remain insurmountable challenges.

Mothers and children throughout the world would continue to die tragically due to a lack of access to the most basic needs. “Unfortunately, these are the current projections for 2015,” he said. As such, it had been very timely of the Secretary-General to create a high-level panel to establish new guidelines for the post-2015 period, he said, adding that his delegation was proud to see a Timorese woman, Emilia Pires, Minister for Finance, among the its members. “Democracy must be an internal process”, he declared, characterizing the process as sometimes long, but vital for a lasting solution. The most recent, dynamic and inspirational example had come from Myanmar, he said, hailing Aung San Suu Kyi as “a woman with an unshakable character, a born leader, a resolute democrat, defender of peaceful solutions and who is today an advocate for internal reconciliation”.

Citing climate change and food insecurity, he stressed the important role of the United Nations in meeting those global challenges. “The United Nations, which consists of all of us here today, has a duty to humanity”, he declared, adding that “we should all acknowledge that we are the privileged agents of the necessary collective change into a better and safer world”. It was vital to reduce the dominance of political and economic interests in favour of social and humanitarian ones, he said. That would require the mobilization of public opinion around the entire world concerning the values of peace and harmony between civilizations and cultures, mutual respect among societies, and tolerance between groups, through dialogue.

It could also start with reform of the Security Council, which should be more representative, he said. There was an imperative need to renew mindsets by incorporating new members, while energizing new commitments and responsibilities. Timor-Leste had been walking the corridors of the United Nations for 38 years, he pointed out, recalling that in the beginning, the nation had wanted to mobilize public opinion in favour of its cause and to warn the world that its fundamental rights were being violated. “Today, we have been informing the international community of our setbacks and our achievements in the construction of a sovereign State,” he said.

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