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SHARED GOAL OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE AT CENTRE OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE, BUT LEADERS CHART DIVERGENT PATHS TO ITS ACHIEVEMENT

Palestinian Authority to Modify Bid for Upgraded Status at UN; Israel Says Time to Halt Iran's Nuclear Weapon Programme by Drawing 'Red Line' through It

In a move intended to bolster the chances for peace, Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, announced in the General Assembly today that his Government would seek status for Palestine as a non-Member State of the United Nations, following what he described as "aborted" efforts last year to have the Security Council allow the State of Palestine to "assume its rightful place in the United Nations", despite widespread support for the initiative.

Mr. Abbas told world leaders gathered on day three of the Assembly's annual general debate that the Palestinian Authority had begun intensive consultations with regional organizations and Member States aimed at having the 193-member body adopt, during this session, a resolution on that bid. He was confident of its broad support by the vast majority of countries.

In those efforts, he issued a clarion call to the international community to uphold its responsibility in the Security Council by adopting a resolution that outlined the foundation for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Such a text would serve as a "binding reference" and guide for the survival of the two-State solution — as envisioned by the historic Oslo Accords 19 years ago. The independence and freedom of a Palestinian State was, above all, a sacred right that must be realized, he said.

To further that aim, the Palestinian Authority had created a model for an effective, modern State, he said. It had held exploratory talks with Israel at the start of the year and created conditions favourable for resuming negotiations. But Israel's actions in his homeland and its position on permanent status issues had led him to conclude that Israel rejected a two-State solution. Moreover, its campaign of "ethnic cleansing" through settlement building was increasingly altering the character of Jerusalem and the West Bank, while its blockade and movement restrictions in Gaza had punished Palestinians for years.

He called for a new approach that would realize an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, over all territory occupied by Israel since 1967. "There is no homeland for us except Palestine," he declared. Peaceful resistance against the occupation would continue. "Let peace be victorious before it is too late."

Israel, too, sought a lasting peace with the Palestinian people, said the country's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But the conflict would not be solved with "libellous speeches at the United Nations" or unilateral declarations of statehood. The parties must negotiate a solution in which a demilitarized Palestine recognized a single Jewish State.

Complicating the broader picture, however, were the forces of radical Islam, he said, which sought to "end the modern world". It had many branches — from the rulers of Iran, to Al-Qaida terrorists to radical cells lurking in every part of the globe — rooted in the same "bitter soil of ignorance". Iran had turned Lebanon and Gaza into terrorist strongholds and continued to deny the Holocaust. With that track record, "who among you would feel safe in the Middle East?" he asked.

The one way to stem Iran's drive to acquire a nuclear weapon was to draw a clear "red line" through its nuclear programme, first and foremost, its efforts to enrich uranium, he proclaimed. Using data from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and a diagram of a bomb and a fuse, he said Iran was well into the second of three enrichment stages, the completion of which would signal a point of no return to halting the programme.

Just days ago, he said, the United States President had reiterated that a nuclear Iran could not be contained. The goal to prevent such a reality united Israelis, Americans and others around the world. The Jewish people had always looked towards the future and worked to expand liberty, promote equality and defend human rights. "Let us commit ourselves to defend those values and protect our common civilization," he concluded.

The Arab world, said Lebanon's Prime Minister, was witnessing one of the most sensitive periods of its modern history. He asked the international community to draw up an economic and cultural road map to assist countries in their new beginnings, and proposed the establishment in Beirut of an institution on good governance. Look at Lebanon, he urged, not as a responsibility, but as an opportunity to provide the safest and fastest way towards all that the Middle East can be: democratic, peaceful and prosperous.

Questions of statehood, independence and security dominated the day's discussion, with world leaders characterizing key twenty-first century challenges less as a clash of race or religion than as a desire for balance between traditional and modern values, whether in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, or Central Asian countries that had broken free from Soviet control. Echoing the statements made by others earlier in the week, several speakers denounced violence in the Middle East, urging that improved conflict prevention tools be developed.

President of Mongolia, Elbegdorj Tsakhia, said his country had planted the flag of democracy in its rich soil more than two decades ago following a revolution that, without breaking a single window or spilling one drop of blood, "swept away decades of rule without consent of the governed". Mongolia was now a stable beacon of good governance, committed to the rule of law. He condemned "needless" violence in Syria and the wider Middle East, and urged delegates to remember that those dying "are our brothers and sisters".

The relationship between the West and the Islamic world, and between their respective value systems were "among the most critical issues of our time", said Bakir Izetbegović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That relationship would pass through periods of misunderstanding and intolerance, but the world must keep searching for a formula for reconciliation. The unsettling trends of inequality, injustice and intolerance would be reversed only by a decisive and coordinated global action.

In one proposal, Janez Janša, Slovenia's Prime Minister, recommended that a strategy be developed to prevent genocide and other mass atrocities. It should include a legal entity that would give the "responsibility to protect" concept new tools to enforce crime prevention and enable a more rapid response to such abuses.

Also addressing the Assembly today were the Heads of State and Government of Tunisia, Guyana, Myanmar, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Equatorial Guinea, Comoros, Jamaica, Cape Verde, Lesotho, Federated States of Micronesia, Maldives, Paraguay, Albania, Libya, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Thailand, Solomon Islands and Somalia.

Other senior ministers and high-level officials from Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, Seychelles, Iraq, South Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Greece, China, Norway, Bahrain, Guinea and Peru also spoke.

Representatives of Iran, Japan and China also made statements in exercise of the right of reply.

The General Assembly will reconvene at 10 a.m. Friday, 28 September, to continue its general debate.

Background

The General Assembly met today to continue the general debate of its sixty-seventh session.

Statements

BAKIR IZETBEGOVIĆ, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, said that today's world was a scene of unfolding crises and mounting challenges, and first and foremost among them was the disaster in Syria. The regime of Bashar al-Assad was answering the yearning of his people for freedom and democracy with guns and bombs, just as his father's regime had done 30 years ago. "This is revolting and morally reprehensible — but so is our collective failure to stop it," he said. Once again, the international community was standing idly by while a human tragedy of dramatic proportions unfolded before its eyes.

The images coming from Syria were reminiscent of the tragedy in Bosnia, which had gone through the same horrors not long ago. Recalling that the Secretary-General had visited the Srebrenica genocide site to mark its 20-year anniversary, and there he had said that he did not want to see any of his successors visiting Syria after 20 years to apologize for the United Nations failure to protect civilians. The best way to honour the victims of Srebrenica would have been to learn the lessons of that failure, and not to commit the same errors ever again. Sadly, the United Nations, and especially the Security Council, had failed to do so. "The international community has chosen, yet again, to repeat the trial-and-error pattern of policies that failed in Bosnia and Herzegovina," he said, adding that the resolutions, statements of concern, ineffective sanctions, observers and no mandate to protect civilians had deadly consequences that had been demonstrated in his country.

"Who could have predicted such an explosion of freedom in the Middle East?" he asked. As a Security Council member, he had strongly supported those aspirations for greater freedom and democracy. At the same time, turning to the "deeply troubling" Israeli-Palestinian stalemate, which continued unabated, he stressed that the peace process was not moving forward. "The chain of violence is not broken," he said. A new impetus to negotiations was urgently needed, because there was no alternative to a negotiated solution. The Palestinians had every right — historic, moral and legal — to a State of their own, and Israel had every right to its security. The occupation must end, but so must the terror and violence. All attempts to create new realities on the ground in the hope that those would become accepted as a starting point must be rejected, he said, adding that Israel should immediately end all settlement activities in the Palestinian territories — the "most serious obstacle to peace". Moreover, he said, "the state of affairs of 60 or 6,000 years ago is not the right point of reference". Instead, it should be the principle of peaceful coexistence between two sovereign States that guided a just resolution to the conflict.

There was no inherent contradiction between Western and Islamic values, he continued, adding "there is no clash". There were only those who needed to create a false perception of clash in order to come to power or maintain their hold on power. Many of the world's societies were in transition, yearning to find a balance between traditional and modern values. The relation between the West and the Islamic world and between their respective value systems would be "one of the most critical issues of our time". That relationship would pass through crises and periods of misunderstanding and intolerance, but the world must keep searching for a formula, for a model of how to reconcile that relationship.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, situated at the westernmost range of Orthodox Christianity and Islam and the easternmost range of Catholicism, represented the meeting point of civilizations — a bridge between East and West. It had enjoyed 1,000 years of tolerance and respect among its citizens; however, a great struggle was now under way between the idea of coexistence and the idea of division. The outcome of that struggle would have a significant bearing on resolving one of the greatest challenges of our time — that of conflict versus cooperation. Indeed, the world was changing at a speed and in a direction that was rightfully worrisome, as inequality, injustice and intolerance were rising. Those unsettling trends would be reversed only by a decisive and coordinated global action, he said.

ELBEGDORJ TSAKHIA, President of Mongolia, said that his country had planted the flag of democracy in its rich soil more than two decades ago following a revolution that, without breaking a single window or spilling one drop of blood, "swept away decades of rule without consent of the governed". Mongolia was now a stable beacon of good governance and was demonstrating its firm commitment to transparency, accountability and the rule of law. "We have recognized that this is the only way our democracy can succeed," he said, stressing that his Government fought against corruption at all levels to ensure that "infectious disease" did not eat away at the public trust, scare away investors or rob citizens of opportunity.

He said that Mongolia's track record of free and fair elections and peaceful political transitions could serve as examples to other countries in the region and around the world. Yet, no democracy was perfect and in its effort to move towards a more direct and participatory system, Mongolia had faced challenges. Indeed, casting ballots was just one priority for democratic progress, and Mongolia was also trying to maintain its extraordinary economic growth — nearly 17 per cent last year. Therefore, the

Government focused on balancing two objectives: sharing the opportunities provided by the country's success with ordinary citizens; and demonstrating that Mongolia "is open for business" and fully engaged in the affairs of the world. The nation's needs were great — improved infrastructure, better healthcare and world-class education — and the Government was prepared to make the investments needed to ensure a better future.

Looking outside his country, he said that all nations must work together to protect the environment and preserve the planet's natural resources, especially as emerging economies expanded and matured. His Government also urged respect for the protection and promotion of human rights. Mongolia was seeking to permanently abolish the death penalty, as it believed that capital punishment was barbaric and should be abolished by all Governments. Mongolia also cared deeply about protecting the planet and safeguarding world peace, and believed in that regard that all nuclear weapons must be eliminated. Strongly denouncing the storage of nuclear waste in his country, he said that all nuclear programmes and activities must abide by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) standards.

"We must take unified action to preserve peace," he continued, turning his focus to situations in the Middle East. He joined others throughout the week in expressing concern about the deadly attack on the United States consulate in Libya, and condemning the "needless violence and bloodshed" in Syria. What had begun as peaceful protests had slowly devolved into a crisis. "We must remember that those that are dying are not just citizens of that nation. They are our brothers and sisters [and] the world should be unified and direct in bringing this bloodshed to an end," he declared, adding: "This is not a television programme. We, members of the United Nations, are not spectators. This body was not created just to watch the show unfold. We have to act."

Turning to other issues, he called strongly for gender equality and women's empowerment, saying that women were the backbone of families and bedrocks of nations. "We need more women leaders. Women tend to see the whole picture [and] for society to advance we need more women in public service at all levels," he said, underscoring that women's unique viewpoint was often missing as strategies were identified to cope with global challenges. The way to empower women was to ensure that girls had the same opportunities for education as boys. Concluding with a call for cooperation and good global governance, he quoted Genghis Khan, who built the largest land empire in history and had said: "It was easier to conquer the world on horseback than to dismount and try to govern." For political leaders, it was not easy to build democracy. It is easier to build statues. It is easier to destroy. It is hard to govern well. But we must all "dismount and govern and govern well." That would be vital for building a world where families were stronger and all nations were prosperous.

MONCEF MARZOUKI, President of Tunisia, said that, through its revolution, Tunisia had entered the fraternity of free and democratic people. But, also today, the world was witnessing a great evil, which had been exacerbated by violence and extremism. "These are issues that need to be seriously addressed," he said. Such behaviour stemmed from extremist policies and had led to human carnage.

Describing his country's experience, he said Tunisia had worked under United Nations auspices to establish peace and avoid confrontation. But, the freedom and democracy that people now enjoyed had come at a high cost: tens of thousands of people held as political prisoners, with hundreds of people killed and injured. Tunisia continued to confront multiple economic and social problems inherited from a regime that had lasted over two decades through sheer force of repression. That paled in comparison to the price being paid by Syrians, where thousands had been killed and the infrastructure destroyed, events that would impact Syrians for decades to come.

"Dictatorship is a disease," he said, which impacted freedom and gave rise to hatred and violence. Europe had only known stability since the fall of the Nazi and communist dictatorships. Political maturity had since been acquired. He invited the United Nations to declare dictatorship a social and political "scourge" to be eliminated by a bold programme similar to that which had eradicated polio and small pox.

In that context, he said the International Criminal Court only tackled crimes after they had been committed, and mechanisms to prevent dictatorship from taking root were needed. Indeed, dictatorships gave themselves a "false legality" by organizing fraudulent elections and using democratic principles to undermine democracy itself. Tunisia's dictator had done just that, with plans to rewrite the Constitution ahead of 2014 elections because he knew there were no internal or international mechanisms to prevent it. There was no Tunisian court to rule on such behaviour. Thus, a preventive mechanism should be part of the United Nations.

The United Nations Charter and the many international conventions were deemed to be humanity's guide, he said, but what was missing was an implementation mechanism. As such, he proposed the creation of an international constitutional court, similar to the International Criminal Court,

to denounce certain constitutions, or illegal charters and elections. That court would consider disputes, and rule on the legality of elections that did not align with the United Nations Charter. All democratic systems would need to be recognized by that tribunal. In turn, countries could seek advice from that body. Such a court would deter tyrannical regimes and strengthen the role of civic resistance.

In that context, he urged rapid intervention to save Syrian lives, and the deployment of an Arab peace force to help create a pluralistic peace. More broadly, he supported Palestinians on their quest for peace and an independent State with Al-Quds as its capital. Denouncing Islamophobia, he urged reducing the chasm between rich and poor. He also insisted on the need to free the Middle East from nuclear weapons. In closing, he stressed that Tunisia was a country of peaceful democratic revolution. The creation of an international constitutional court should make its way onto the Assembly's agenda's, an idea he hoped would garner international support, as that would help succeeding generations avoid a scourge that had cost the world so dearly.

DONALD RABINDRANATH RAMOTAR, President of Guyana, said a "tide of change" was evident from local to global levels and was either being precipitated or accompanied by multiple crises within the global community. In the economic realm, continuing adverse conditions stymied global efforts at achieving internationally agreed upon development goals, with a sluggish recovery from the financial crisis compounded by a slowdown in output in major emerging economies. In view of that, developing countries had paid a heavy price, which was reflected in growth that was generally lower than pre-crisis levels.

Guyana had had to face many serious challenges, yet it had achieved an annual 5 per cent economic growth rate, which he believed was rooted in investing in people, with more than 30 per cent of the national budget dedicated to education, health, housing, water and social programmes. Even though Guyana had achieved universal primary education and had come a long way towards reaching the same in secondary schools, significant challenges remained in reaching people in remote areas, he said.

"If we are to encourage our youth to become responsible citizens and to prepare them to be the leaders of tomorrow, we must ensure that our education systems allow for the development of their full potential," he said. Further, he said if the financial crisis continued it would have adverse effects on developing country growth, and it had already seen growing negative social problems, including drug and human trafficking, issues that needed a united approach to address.

Another area needing urgent attention was the climate crisis, he said, adding that global responses had not been fast or effective enough. "We cannot continue to deal with threats to the survival of the planet with such casualness," he said. While some countries were taking those threats seriously, including Norway, the path was not without hurdles. While he applauded efforts at the Rio+20 conference and the sustainable development pledges made there, he said the plight of the poor was worsening, with food prices rising and droughts decimating crop yields. In line with the Five Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security, Guyana called for an acceleration of the twin-track approach to enhance direct action against hunger for the most vulnerable, and for promoting medium- to long-term sustainability in agriculture and rural development.

The tide of democratic change that had swept the planet had raised people's expectations for social progress and better standards of living in an environment of enlarged freedoms. Those aspirations deserved the respect and encouragement of Governments concerned and from the international community, he said. The United Nations must continue to pursue peaceful solutions to political conflicts, no matter how slow or painstaking the process may be. He urged warring parties in Syria to negotiate. He said the United Nations must persevere in finding a peaceful end to conflict in Syria, and concerning Israel and Palestine. He was encouraged by the efforts of Sudan and South Sudan to resolve their differences through negotiations and hoped Mali would be able to overcome its crisis. He also noted that his country stood firmly against the economic, financial and commercial embargo imposed on Cuba, and called for an immediate end to that policy.

THEIN SEIN, President of Myanmar, affirming that his country's foreign policy valued peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the theme of the high-level session, said that his country was making progress on its democratic path despite the challenges. "Within a short time, the people of Myanmar have been able to bring about amazing changes," he stressed, adding, "I feel greatly privileged and honoured to dutifully serve as their President at this crucial time." The country was leaving behind an authoritarian system to put in place a democratic Government and a strong, viable parliament with a system of checks and balances.

Accomplishments so far, he said, included the granting of amnesty to prisoners, the dignified return of political exiles, the convening of free and fair elections, the abolition of media censorship, the opening of free Internet access, the establishment of workers' and employers' organizations and

increased participation in the political process, which he said was now characterized by tolerance and dialogue. Noting that opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was now chairperson of a committee in Parliament, he congratulated her for the worldwide honours she had received. Hoping reforms would pave the way for better living standards for the people, he said laws were being adopted by Parliament with the goals of ensuring that income gaps did not widen, protecting citizens' rights, preserving the natural environment, bringing workers' rights to international standards and ensuring transparency and impartiality in the extractive sectors of the economy.

He said that the country was also working hard to bring an end to longstanding conflicts in its ethnic regions, with ceasefires having been agreed to with 10 armed groups. Peace talks would continue along with the strengthening of confidence-building measures, aiming for a lasting peace agreement. In the north, the leaders of the Government Peace Work Committee and the Kachin armed groups were following such a process to prevent further loss of life and property. In addition, a national-level, independent commission had been established to investigate the recent communal violence in Rakhine state and to report to him.

He affirmed that all inhabitants of Myanmar, regardless of race, religion and gender, had the right to live in peace and security and that the commission would include respected representatives from not only all strata of society but also from the Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Hindu faiths. Field visits to Rakhine had been facilitated, in addition, for representatives of international organizations and foreign diplomats, and aid access had been granted to "those organizations who are willing to provide it to both the communities without discrimination". Solving the issue would require sustained attention on multiple levels. He stressed that, as a sovereign State, his country had the right to secure its borders and to protect its sovereignty. It would do its best to resolve the issue in line with international norms.

"Myanmar's democratic transformation will be a complex and delicate one that requires patience," he said. Understanding and support was needed from the international community, as well as from the people of Myanmar. "It is equally important that Myanmar should be viewed from a different and new perspective. It is also necessary for us to be able to work in a more conducive and favourable environment than ever before," he added. The country would be participating more actively in the United Nations, taking on "the challenges of the twenty-first century in a bold and resolute manner". In that light, he paid tribute to the legacy of his countryman U Thant, the third Secretary-General of the United Nations.

GJORGE IVANOV, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said that in a diverse world, the United Nations Charter, with its principles and fundamental values, provided a common denominator that linked all peoples and countries, regardless of culture, language or religion. His Government was firmly dedicated to respecting the Charter. Since his country's declaration of independence, peaceful dispute resolution had guided its behaviour as a responsible member of the international community. He welcomed that that issue was the topic of this year's debate.

"An ounce of prevention is the same as a pound of medicine," he said, noting that his country's early experience hosting the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force had been a positive one. It was reasonable to pay attention to efficient resource use, which was why his country was following all activities related to the Secretary-General's report on civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict, and the implementation of recommendations made by the Senior Advisory Group. It was ready to share its experience in the area of democratic institution-building, based on the Macedonian inclusive model of "integration without assimilation".

He went on to underline the importance of the rule of law, and its particular importance to the development, promotion and protection of human rights. Human rights should reinforce national sovereignty. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia would continue making efforts to preserve and promote human rights, and to promote democracy, the rule of law and gender equality. Recalling his country's chairmanship of the South-East European Cooperation Process, he said cooperation could be intensified by fulfilling assumed obligations and commitments. The Macedonian chairmanship would prioritize cooperation in agriculture, culture and tourism, science and education, cross-border cooperation and environmental protection. His country also expected its neighbours to show solidarity in action for a safer region.

He went on to explain that he had asked the Secretary-General to renew attention to the 2008 report of the independent expert on minority issues entitled: "Promotion and protection of all human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development". That report recommended that his country's southern neighbour should abstain from disputing whether there was a Macedonian minority and instead focus on the protection of the rights to self-identification and the freedoms of expression and association. That neighbour was urged to respect the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights, according to which the association should be allowed to use the word Macedonian to denote its name and to freely express its ethnic identity.

He had expressed his expectation that the Secretary-General use his authority to unblock talks taking place under his auspices, regarding the "name difference". "I believe this process can lead to a solution," he said. "But we cannot wait another 19 years." The best way to reach a solution was to respect the United Nations Charter, the Interim Accord and the judgement of the International Court of Justice. Today, it seems "absurd" to be named "a former" nation. Recalling that the International Court of Justice 1948 advisory opinion had determined that placing additional criteria on United Nations membership contravened the United Nations Charter, he said that his country had been deprived of the right to self-identification.

Moreover, 10 months ago, the Court had adopted a judgement that his country had the right to refer to itself as "the Republic of Macedonia" in its relations with the other party and within international organizations. He appealed to his country's neighbour to "work together in this direction". His country looked forward to being partners and allies in building the future of their peoples and the region, and had proposed signing a bilateral agreement on evasion of double taxation. In closing, he said his country would actively participate in realizing the United Nations goals.

TEODORO OBIANG NGUEMA MBASOGO, President of Equatorial Guinea, said the general debate was taking place during turbulent times, characterized by a stagnant global economy, ongoing tensions, environmental degradation and natural disasters, requiring resolute, joint action by all stakeholders. Of all the problems facing the international community, none had been as debilitating as poverty and underdevelopment. Indeed, poverty, malnutrition and poor health care continued to take more lives worldwide each year than conflict and natural disasters combined. Moreover, the effects of poor education and lack of access to new technologies could actually end up being more detrimental to the future of humankind than terrorism or other ills.

In that light, he urged the Economic and Social Council to bolster its work on behalf of the least developed countries. That body, with the support of Member States, could play a major role in alleviating poverty and tackling all its attendant ills. Africa, he continued, was pressing ahead with its development efforts and Equatorial Guinea, in particular, was devoting a large share of its resources to improving infrastructure in sanitation, transportation and water. It was also enacting vital political reforms that would ensure broader civilian participation in decision-making. Those reforms were also setting term limits for political institutions and set the parameters for public-private activity.

To help the least developed countries cope with humanitarian challenges, he proposed the creation of a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) trust fund specifically devoted to ensuring food security in Africa. As an initial investment, his Government would provide some \$30 million to such a fund and would urge other nations to do likewise. Turning to peace and security matters, he said respect and compliance with international commitments and respect for State sovereignty were crucial to ensuring stability and justice. No single country could seek to impose its will in international relations. Such actions would undermine the work of the United Nations.

As for reform of the Security Council, he joined the African consensus calling for two permanent seats on an expanded Council and five non-permanent seats. Africa was demanding its place in international relations so that it could play its rightful role in decision-making. Africa was also contributing to efforts to shift international relations from unilateralism towards multilateralism. He denounced selectivity in the application of international legal frameworks, especially in the area of nuclear energy. Moreover, sanctions and embargoes that targeted specific nations ran counter to the aims of the United Nations and undermined efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. With all that in mind, he expressed the hope that the Assembly's sixty-seventh session would become known as a milestone in the effort to humanize international relations.

IKILILLOU DHOININE, President of Comoros, said that, as had been the case last year, the General Assembly was being held yet again in a global context marked by uncertainty and multifaceted crises. It took place at a moment when Syria was suffering a great tragedy, and the recent resignation of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan as the Joint Special Envoy to that country showed the complexity of managing such a crisis. It, therefore, behoved the international community to act. Equally important was the Palestinian cause, he added, which had long awaited a just solution. Comoros reiterated its full support to the Palestinian people, and associated itself with the solution of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel. Noting, in addition, that the situation in northern Mali also remained a major source of concern, Comoros associated itself with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union efforts to bring an end to the conflict.

A few decades ago, Comoros had committed itself resolutely to the path of democracy, and now it lent its support to the cause of peace, justice and fairness. As President, he said, he would "leave no stone unturned" in his promotion of democracy and good governance in Comoros. In that

regard, he had given priority to the fight against corruption, with a new anti-corruption law and establishment of a national commission to that end.

The global financial and economic crisis lay at the heart of this year's General Debate yet again, he went on. The crisis had revealed the urgent need for in-depth reform of the international financial institutions. The effects of the crisis — and a related energy crisis — were increasingly palpable, especially in developing States. Another major concern was climate change, which disproportionately affected small island developing States. In Comoros, devastating rains had recently come down, affecting an estimated ten per cent of the population. Conveying gratitude to all partners that had provided humanitarian assistance in response to that unprecedented disaster, he noted that the country had elaborated a rapid recovery plan which spelled out actions aimed at rebuilding over a 6-12 month period. He called on partners to help support that recovery effort, whose cost was estimated at some \$18 million.

The time had come to address several important issues at the international level, including making operational the Copenhagen Climate Fund. Commitments to States of the global South must also be honoured, and countries must abide by commitments in emission reductions. Also, no effort should be spared in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Faced with those challenges — all of which were equally important — he called on the most developed States to ensure that mechanisms aimed at mitigating the financial crisis in Europe also be applied to the most fragile States in order to prevent more serious consequences, in particular as they depended on the financial contributions of their diasporas. Comoros, a beneficiary of the International Monetary Fund's extended credit programme, also hoped to reach, by December 2012, the point of achievement of the initiative for small heavily-indebted countries.

Finally, he called, yet again, on France to engage in "candid and sincere dialogue" on the question of the Comorian Island of Mayotte. The fact that the island remained under French administration constituted a threat to the peace and stability of the three other Comorian Islands, he said, adding that it was no secret that the island had always served as a base for the enemies of Comoros, who did not wish to see the island progress. This year, several men, women and children had perished in the waters separating the Comorian islands of Anjouan and Mayotte, as a result of the visa imposed by France on the islands of Anjouan, Grande Comore and Moheli. He hoped, in that regard, that France would honour its commitments under international law and respond positively to the calls to return Mayotte to its natural home in the Comoros.

HAJI AL-MUHTADEE BILLAH, Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, said that at its core, the Secretary-General's five-year vision for the work of the United Nations was about tolerance, respect and understanding among nations. Sadly, over the past two weeks, the world had witnessed events that presented a conflicting vision. In observing them, his nation had unreservedly condemned their cause, but it had equally stressed Brunei's absolute rejection of the violence and extremism that had been their result. He congratulated the Secretary-General on his statement regarding the matter and reaffirmed his country's commitment to the universal values of tolerance and respect.

Turning to the theme of this year's general debate — "the adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means" — he said the word "adjustment" had been well-chosen, as it suggested that such dispute settlement must be carried out carefully and gradually to ensure that it did not invite confrontation. The theme provided him with an opportunity to express both satisfaction and concern about the way in which the Organization was managing the process of globalization. "Are we satisfied with the way things are, or do we see a need for some 'adjustment'?" he asked.

Beneath all the headlines about the failures and setbacks, the United Nations was making enormous contributions to the welfare of future generations by helping countries leave nineteenth century colonialism and twentieth century nationalism behind and "adjust" to twenty-first century regionalism and, eventually, "globalism". The Organization had before it difficult work to ensure sustainable development for all. In that regard, he was pleased to see that, in the wake of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development — known as Rio+20 — work was moving from theory towards many practical ideas and activities. He was also encouraged that the Secretary-General had reported significant progress on achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including, among others, that the target of cutting in half the number of people living in extreme poverty had been reached ahead of time.

In light of those and other achievements, it was clear that the work of the Organization did not need "adjustment". Rather, he said, there was perhaps a need to adjust its structure. Indeed, the fact that it was a twentieth century structure attempting to address twenty-first century realities had often led the media to highlight "supposed defects, failures and setbacks". He said that the weakness of the Organization's structure was personified by the Palestinian peoples' six decades of suffering and by "all

other desperate situations in which the root causes of conflict and confrontation are still buried in the last century". Simply put, that must change; in a globalized world, all nations were interdependent and equally responsible.

Like many Member States, Brunei Darussalam believed that the current structure of the United Nations did not reflect that interdependence and mutual responsibility. "As such, it needs adjusting so that ancient political fault lines are repaired," he said, expressing the hope that the Organization would increasingly operate on the basis of consensus, rather than compromise and confrontation. That was the principle that had been accepted by Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members, who focused on building a peaceful and mutually respectful community of nations, regardless of background, economic status or national concerns. ASEAN countries had chosen to "adjust" the regions' earlier identity as one of the most unstable places on the planet. "In the same way, we hope the structure of the United Nations can be gradually and carefully adjusted," he said.

PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER, Prime Minister of Jamaica, said that the United Nations agenda had expanded to address the multifaceted challenges of food security, climate change, global pandemics and the global economic and financial crisis. It had witnessed citizens from several nations "spring" into action with demands for change, while others chose to "occupy" various spaces in protest. In light of that reality, many world leaders "stand as buffers between apathy and anarchy". Given such events, the theme for this year's session, "bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means", was therefore most appropriate and timely, she said, adding that "the insecurity, impatience and unease that have emerged worldwide are explosive accelerants."

She reminded the Assembly of the words of the Jamaican national hero, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who had said that "poverty is a hellish state to be in. It is no virtue, it is a crime." The international community must rid itself of the conditions which led to poverty, instead pursuing social and economic policies that would ensure equity and justice and increase the wellbeing and sense of security of peoples. That could only be achieved if Member States worked together in good faith to secure the sustainable future agreed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development — Rio+20 — concluded in June. "Let us create the future we want [...] and put our people first," she said.

The global economy continued to be beset by uncertainty, which was compounded by the lingering negative effects of the financial and economic crises. The global shocks had affected all peoples, threatening communities and weakening families, regardless of hemisphere or region, or whether they lived in a "developed" or "developing" country. The world must not forget that a significant portion of its poorest citizens live in middle-income countries, she said in that respect, noting that that diverse group included both large developing economies and small island developing States, such as those in the Caribbean. Several of those States were highly indebted and extremely vulnerable to external shocks and natural disasters, and faced significant obstacles in their efforts to spur economic recovery and growth. They were hampered by the volatility of energy and food prices, decreases in export commodity prices, and weak capital flows.

Reforms in global economic governance, including the international financial institutions, were required to take into account the need for special and differential treatment for small and vulnerable economies. Refocusing the development agenda in terms of financial flows would also go a long way in helping to bolster their natural resilience and resolve. In that vein, there was also a particularly vulnerable group: the women and children for whom "external shocks" caused real and serious dislocation. Too many mothers had to face tough choices to meet their basic needs, she said, and too many children were subject to abuse. Children, especially girls, were being used as "pawns for economic gain", including through human trafficking and other exploitative actions. Jamaica was resolute in its commitment to strengthening local and national programmes to eliminate violence against women and children, and called on the international community to also take bold actions to address that "scourge".

As the world was at the threshold of the 2015 deadline for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, she wished to underscore, in particular, the situation of the middle-income countries. In that respect, country categorizations should not serve as obstacles to delivering support to the world's poorest and most vulnerable. "We urge that middle-income countries not be pushed to the margins of the development agenda, nor be put on the fringe of the development assistance provided by the international community," she said in that regard. A review of the factors used by the relevant multilateral agencies in the measurement of a country's wealth was urgently needed; Jamaica therefore supported the proposals put forward by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for an alternative, but complementary, approach to the criterion of per capita income for the allocation of financing for development.

JORGE CARLOS DE ALMEIDA FONSECA, President of Cape Verde, said the world was still reeling from fallout from the economic and financial crisis, which had impacted social development efforts in many countries. His country was among a host of small nations that could provide modest solutions to help overcome many of the day's global challenges. Specifically, Cape Verde could be seen as an example of peaceful coexistence and peaceful progress. The people of the island nation were committed to a culture of tolerance, and that principle had shaped its political policies. He was certain the Cape Verdean way of life had contributed in some way to easing tensions throughout Southern Africa. "We can almost say that our foreign policy has been the translation of our peaceful ideology," he added.

He went on to say that a key example of that peaceful way of life was the fact that earlier this week, its Constitution had celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Cape Verde's guiding document had ensured peaceful political transitions and had aimed to integrate the principles of the United Nations. He acknowledged that work was ongoing to bolster the Constitution and see that all its noble aims were achieved. Despite the challenges that his small country faced, he was pleased to say that it was on track to achieve the Millennium Goals. Cape Verde had also received positive reviews from major financial institutions in the latest Human Development Report.

At the same time, Cape Verde could not ignore that its small economy, based on a few key sectors and activities, would continue to need support. The Government would also need assistance as it sought to address social exclusion, outmoded infrastructure and youth unemployment. Moreover, Cape Verde, like many other island nations, was deeply concerned about the possibility of facing a major natural disaster. As such, the international community must spare no effort in strengthening environmental protection measures and make progress on "green" initiatives that would enhance sustainable development.

Turning to wider Africa, he expressed profound concern that regional Governments continued to be disproportionately affected by fallout from the financial crisis and environmental degradation. Those factors were exacerbated by the fact that those Governments were already struggling to cope with a host of ills, including political instability, tensions and the rise of extremism in some areas. Yet, a new wave of African leaders was seeking to do more for the continent. And in that effort, the international community must do more to assist them.

Africa was awash in recommendations, recipes and proposals, but what were needed were real actions leading to real development. Getting there would require Africa to adopt a new line of thought that did not reject the universal values of democracy. "African needs to reconquer its self-confidence and to strengthen the ties between the United Nations and the African Union to create a true partnership for development," he said. At the same time, the international community would need to ensure a more equitable trade environment and to step up efforts to achieve sustainable development.

MAHMOUD ABBAS, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, said attacks by the "terrorist militias" of Israeli settlers had become a daily reality, with at least 535 attacks perpetrated since the start of 2012. Palestinians faced relentless waves of attacks against their mosques, churches, homes and schools. Increased attacks should not surprise anyone; they stemmed from a policy that prioritized settlements and a racist climate fuelled by a "culture of incitement" in the Israeli curriculum and extremist declarations.

Since the Assembly's last session, Israel had continued its settlement campaign in Jerusalem and its environs, he said, aiming at altering the city's historic character. It was a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" against Palestinians by demolishing homes, revoking residency rights, denying basic services, closing institutions and impoverishing people through a "siege" of walls and checkpoints. Settlement building continued throughout the West Bank, while attacks persisted against the Gaza Strip. He urged that Israel be compelled to respect the Geneva Conventions, lift the blockade of Gaza and investigate the detention of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails.

He said Israel continued to impose severe restrictions on movement, preventing the Palestinian National Authority from implementing infrastructure projects and providing services to its citizens. Its overall policy was undermining the Authority's ability to carry out its functions and implement its obligations. Such actions were taking place amid an Israeli political discourse that brandished extremist positions, which incited religious conflict. "This is something we firmly reject," he said, stressing that such discourse only fuelled those trying to use tolerant monotheistic religions as ideological justification for terrorism.

To surmount that impasse, Palestinians had held exploratory talks with Israel at the start of the year, upon Jordan's initiative, he said, and had made efforts to create favourable conditions to resume negotiations. But Israel's actions in his homeland and position on permanent status issues had led him

to conclude that Israel rejected the two-State solution. A State of Palestine coexisting alongside Israel represented the "historic compromise" of the Oslo Declaration of Principles adopted 19 years ago under United States auspices, by which Palestinians had accepted to establish their State on only 22 per cent of the territory of historic Palestine. Israeli measures aimed to empty the Oslo Accords of their meaning, making their implementation extremely difficult if not impossible.

Further, Israel refused to seriously discuss the issue of Palestinian refugees, he said, and continued its occupation of Palestinian water basins, agricultural land, air, skies and borders. It refused to allow Palestinians to attain their rights and rejected the independence of a State of Palestine. "I speak on behalf of an angry people," he said, calling Israel's evasion of accountability a license for it to continue its policy of dispossession and ethnic cleansing.

Despite the complexity of the reality and all the frustration, "there is still a chance — maybe the last — to save the two-State solution and to salvage peace," he said, urging a new approach based on an understanding that a racist "settler colonization" must be condemned, punished and boycotted. It also required reaffirmation of and adherence to the terms of reference endorsed by the United Nations. Marathon talks were not needed, but rather the sincere intention to reach peace. The approach must include realization of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, over all territory occupied by Israel since 1967, as well as an agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee issue, in line with resolution 194 (III), as prescribed in the Arab Peace Initiative.

The international community must now uphold its responsibilities, he said. He called on the Security Council to adopt a resolution on the foundations for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which would be the basis and foundation and serve as a "binding reference" if the two-State solution was to survive. The independence and freedom of a State of Palestine was a sacred right that must be realized. The Palestinian National Authority had affirmed its ability to create an advanced model for a modern State, achievements recognized by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the World Bank, among others. A year ago, he had submitted the application for consideration by the Security Council to allow the State of Palestine to assume its rightful place in the United Nations, efforts that were aborted despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of countries supported them. A year later, "Palestine" was playing its role in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with high professionalism.

His Government would continue its efforts to obtain full membership for Palestine at the United Nations, he said, and had begun consultations with regional organizations and Member States aimed at having the General Assembly adopt, during this session, a resolution considering the State of Palestine as a non-Member State of the United Nations. Today, 77 per cent of Palestinians were younger than 35 years old and they would not allow a new Nakba to occur. All Palestinians would continue to survive on their beloved land, every inch of which carried evidence of their roots. "There is no homeland for us except Palestine," he said. Palestinians would continue peaceful resistance, in line with international humanitarian law, against the occupation for the sake of freedom, independence and peace. "Let peace be victorious before it is too late," he said.

JANEZ JANŠA, Prime Minister of Slovenia, recalling the Assembly's theme on peaceful dispute settlement, drew attention to "horrific scenes" in Syria, where a civil war had dragged on for months. Mediation had failed. "It shocks our conscience that we have been unable to stop bloodshed," he said. The situation was critical. It spoke to the urgent need to enhance the preventive capacities of the United Nations and regional organizations. Efforts to avert mass atrocities were needed.

He reminded the Assembly that last year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the result of tireless efforts by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer, who stalked the halls each day until the Assembly finally adopted it in December 1948. The world had waited half a century to see the first conviction of a person for the crime of genocide. The establishment of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, and later, the International Criminal Court, were milestones in the humanization of international relations.

Further, the United Nations had improved its coordination of genocide prevention activities, he said, but he regretted that common understanding on the modalities of the responsibility to protect had not been reached, and he urged strengthening both focus and dialogue to that end. In the years since World War II, more than 80 countries had experienced mass atrocities that led to 53 million innocent lives lost. Behind those numbers were families who were still traumatized and societies with distorted creative potential. "We should be able to set basic limits to human behaviour and stop mass atrocities," he said.

With that in mind, he recommended that a new strategy be developed to prevent genocide and other mass atrocities that would see an intergovernmental forum of like-minded countries propose a resolution setting a clear mandate for the adoption of an appropriate legal mechanism. That entity would give the concept of the responsibility to protect new tools by enforcing crime prevention and enabling a more rapid, effective response to such abuses. Slovenia stood ready to start a dialogue and would convene the first meeting in the coming months. The initiative originated from international civil society, he said, adding that the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin had attracted thousands of supporters from among international non-governmental organizations, lawyers, students, journalists and other individuals. It was not “just one lonely initiative”; there were many others across the globe.

States also should enhance their collaboration to prosecute alleged perpetrators of genocide and mass atrocities, he said, urging that a culture of prevention be created that would see a better understanding of the warning signs that would trigger early action. Condemning violence against diplomatic missions, he said the freedom of speech was fundamental in democracy and that only through strengthened intercultural dialogue could the potential for conflict be diminished. Each and every nation had an enormous duty — and opportunity — to prevent atrocities. “We do not want the mistakes of yesterday to be repeated tomorrow,” he said, inviting the Assembly to join Slovenia’s efforts towards a world free of genocide.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU, Prime Minister of Israel, told the Assembly that, three thousand years ago, King David had reigned over the Jewish State in its eternal capital, Jerusalem. In saying that, he addressed, in particular, those who proclaimed that the Jewish State had no roots in the region, and that it would soon disappear. The Jewish people had lived on, and “the Jewish State will live forever”, he said. Even after it was exiled from Israel, the Jewish people never gave up the dream of returning to their ancient homeland; over time, they had restored independence and rebuilt their national life. “The Jewish people have come home, and we will never be uprooted again,” he stressed.

Yesterday, on the holiest day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur, Jews had taken stock of the past, prayed for the future, and remembered the sorrows of persecution, including the extermination of a third of its people — 6 million — during the Holocaust. But, at the end of the day, they had celebrated the heroism of their people and the marvel of the “flourishing, modern” Jewish State. “We walk the same paths tread by our patriarchs”, but “we blaze new trails in science, technology, medicine and agriculture”, he said, adding that the past and the future found common ground in his nation. Unfortunately, that was not the case in many other countries, as a great battle was being waged between the modern and the medieval. Modernity sought a bright future in which the rights of all were protected and life was precious. The forces of medievalism sought a world in which women were subjugated, and in which rights were suppressed and death, not life, was glorified. Nowhere was that more stark than in the Middle East, he said.

Israel stood firmly with the forces of modernity. Its exceptional creativity was matched by its remarkable compassion, he said, describing Israeli humanitarian efforts during recent crises in Haiti, Japan, Tunisia and elsewhere. Israel treated thousands of Palestinian Arabs in its hospitals. Indeed, it was because Israel so cherished life that it also cherished and sought peace. It sought to preserve historic ties with Egypt and Jordan, and to forge a lasting peace with the Palestinian People. However, he emphasized, “we won’t solve our conflict with libellous speeches at the United Nations” or with “unilateral declarations of statehood”. Instead, the parties must sit together to negotiate a solution in which a demilitarized Palestinian State recognized the one and only Jewish State.

Israel wanted to see the three great religions that had sprung from its region coexist in peace and mutual respect, he went on. But, the forces of radical Islam, which sought supremacy over all of Islam, wanted to extinguish freedom and “end the modern world”. It had many branches, from the rulers of Iran to Al-Qaida terrorists to the radical cells lurking in every part of the world. They were all rooted in the same “bitter soil of intolerance”, he said, and they were directed at their fellow Muslims, at Christians, and Jews, at secular people and at anyone who did not submit to their creed. However, he stressed that “ultimately, they will fail... ultimately light will penetrate the darkness”. Ignorance had given way to enlightenment in the past, and so, too, would the Middle East once again be guided not by fanaticism and conspiracy, but by reason and curiosity. The question was not whether fanaticism would be defeated, but how many lives would be lost before it was defeated.

In the past, those who opposed fanaticism had waited too long to act, at a “horrific cost”. That could not happen again. “Nothing could imperil the world more than the arming of Iran with nuclear weapons.” Likening a nuclear-armed Iran to a nuclear-armed Al-Qaida, he said that both were fired “by the same hatred, and driven by the same lust for violence”. He pointed to the actions of Iran to date, even without nuclear weapons: it had brutally put down protests for democracy in its own country in 2009, and abetted the killing of American soldiers in Iraq. It had turned Lebanon and Gaza into terrorist strongholds, embedding thousands of rockets and missiles. Thousands of those had been fired at Israel by their terrorist proxies. It had even plotted to blow up a restaurant a few blocks from the White House,

and continued to deny the Holocaust, as it had done again this week at the United Nations. Given that record of Iranian aggression, he asked the Assembly to imagine its actions with nuclear weapons. In that context, "who among you would feel safe in the Middle East?" Who would feel safe in Europe, in America or anywhere?

Some believed that a nuclear-armed Iran could be deterred, as the Soviet Union had once been. But, that was a dangerous assumption. Secular Marxists were very different from a country with suicide bombers, he warned. For Iran, in fact, mutually assured destruction was not a deterrent, it was an inducement. One of their leaders had said that using a nuclear weapon on Israel would destroy everything, but it would only "harm" the Islamic world, and, thus, it was not irrational to contemplate such a reality. And that was coming from a so-called moderate.

He had been speaking about the need to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon for 15 years, but now "the hour is getting very late". Diplomacy had not worked, as Iran had used those negotiations to bide time to advance its nuclear programme. Strong sanctions had had an effect on the Iranian economy, but they had not stopped the country's nuclear programme. At this late hour, there was one way to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, and that was to "place a clear red line" on its nuclear programme, he said. "Red lines don't lead to war, red lines prevent war", he said in that respect, describing several incidents in history where that rule had been proven true; for example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s red line had prevented war in Europe for half a century, and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and other conflicts might have been avoided with a clear red line.

To be credible, he said, such a line must be drawn, first and foremost, on Iran's efforts to enrich uranium. Producing a diagram of a bomb and a fuse, he demonstrated how much enriched uranium was needed to produce a nuclear weapon, and showed the three stages that Iran would go through in order to do it. It was currently well into the second stage and, at current enrichment rates, it would finish the second stage by next spring or summer. That information was not a secret; it was based on IAEA reports that anyone could read online. "If these are the facts — and they are — where should a red line be drawn?" he asked, and answered that it should be drawn before Iran completed the second stage of nuclear enrichment, before it was just a few months or weeks away from amassing enough uranium for a nuclear weapon.. "Each day, that point is getting closer", he stressed, and everyone should, therefore, have a sense of urgency.

Some claimed that even if they crossed that line, intelligence services would be able to find where and when they were making the fuse and preparing the bomb and warhead. Yet, while no one had more respect for intelligence services than Israel's Prime Minister and they had saved many lives, they were not foolproof. For longer than two years they had not known that Iran was building a huge uranium enrichment plant under a mountain. Should the security of the world rest on the assumption that a small workshop somewhere in a country half the size of Europe can be found in time? The red line must be drawn on the enrichment facilities because those were the only facilities that could be definitely seen and credibly targeted. He believed that, "faced with a clear red line, Iran will back down".

Just days ago at the United Nations, United States President Barack Obama had reiterated that a nuclear-armed Iran could not be contained. Indeed, the goal to prevent such a reality united Israelis and Americans, as well as others around the world. "Together we can chart a course forward," he said. The Jewish people had always looked towards the future and worked to expand liberty, promote equality and defend human rights. "Let us commit ourselves to defend those values, and protect our common civilization," he concluded.

THOMAS MOTSOAHAE THABANE, Prime Minister of Lesotho, said that while there was no doubt that today's multifaceted challenges could be effectively resolved, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find solutions within the multilateral system. Indeed, unilateral actions that defied civility and international legality were becoming more frequent on the international stage. Despite the lessons of history, there were countries that still believed that they could solve the world's political problems through war and coercion. He said that there was no comfort in the potential conflict brewing between Iran and Western powers over that country's nuclear programme. Yet, the looming crisis could be avoided not through threats, but through negotiations based on respect for sovereign equality. "Our generation is already faced with too many problems. Surely we cannot afford another avoidable war," he added.

On other matters of global concern, he said his Government was saddened by increasing tension between China and Japan over the East China Sea. Rather than fanning the flames of discord between the two sides, "we must instead encourage them to resolve their differences with maturity through peaceful dialogue." As for the Middle East, he said it was time for individual interests to give way to compassion and reason, so that the Palestinian people could enjoy their inalienable right to self determination "in our lifetime". The two-State solution had long been held as the only plausible way forward, and the international community must prevail upon Israel to support it. He went on to call for

the lifting of the embargo against Cuba, and urged Morocco to cooperate with the international community towards facilitating independence and self-determination in the Western Sahara.

He said that Africa, like several other regions, was trying to rid itself of wars and conflict. "While we thought we had dealt with the scourge of coups d'état, it has recently reared its ugly head in a few countries," he said, calling on the international community to join with the African Union and stand firm in refusing to recognize any Government that came to power through unconstitutional means. Africa had adopted a "zero-tolerance" policy on the matter and urged the international community to do likewise. He acknowledged that Africa has had some success in settling disputes peacefully, as seen with the United Nations, African Union and other stakeholders working to pave the way for peace in Somalia. He urged the international community to support measures that would prevent that long-troubled nation from relapsing into conflict.

Turning to development issues, he said that along with "gloomy" prospects for global economic recovery, the world faced challenges posed by climate change, including extreme weather conditions, floods, droughts and sea level rise. In Lesotho, drought and floods had heightened food insecurity and famine was looming. He said that last month, his Government had had to declare that Lesotho faced a food crisis, and had to call on its development partners for assistance. Humbly reiterating that call, he said that meanwhile, the Government's response to the crisis would focus on subsidizing agricultural inputs and promoting drought resistant crops. It would also scale up conservation farming and provide nutrition services to nursing mothers and young children. Further to that, he said that while the outcome of the Rio+20 summit had not met everyone's expectations, there was still hope that a sustainable future was within reach through ensuring the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

EMANUEL MORI, President of the Federated States of Micronesia, said climate change was the biggest challenge facing his country, not only the projections of future loss and damage, but the dangerous impacts that "my people are experiencing now as well". Sadly, no significant progress had been made on climate change mitigation to date, he noted, adding that he had asked himself time and again: "How do I tell my people that their plight and their future lie in the hands of those most responsible for greenhouse gases?" Stressing the need to increase collective efforts to confront global climate change more urgently and creatively, he called on major emitters to step up their engagement under the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period. In that regard, he said his Government was pleased with the agreement reached at the Rio+20 Conference to begin cooperation on a global phase-down of production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons, having first proposed amending the Montreal Protocol in 2009. Today it remained the ideal instrument for that task.

As a Pacific small island developing State, "our livelihood, our economy, our culture and our way of living are tied to a blue economy", he said, emphasizing that conservation and the sustainable use of ocean resources was vital to achieving sustainable development. He said the rising cost of global energy continued to pose a serious challenge to socioeconomic development and sustainability, pointing out that small island developing States like his own continued to rely heavily on imported fossil fuel despite the abundance of renewable energy sources. Their unique and particular vulnerabilities often translated into significantly higher costs for energy infrastructure and fossil fuels. As a result, the Government spent a high percentage of its limited budget on fossil-fuel procurement alone, often at the expense of other sectors of the economy.

With his country's health-care system increasingly under stress, he said the constant challenge posed by the growing burden of non-communicable diseases had reached epidemic proportions in the Pacific. While recognizing that primary responsibility for health rested with the Government, he sought international assistance in capacity-building, institutional-strengthening and policy formulation. The Government supported greater participation by women in social, political and economic development, and looked to development partners to help raise investment in that field to ensure that the potential of women was nurtured and realized through quality education, health-care services and protection against domestic and gender-based violence.

Concerning the United Nations, he said the Organization's single most urgent need was reform of the Security Council. "Naturally, such an important step must not be taken in haste, but, after more than a decade of talking, we should be closer to finding an acceptable formulation", he said, adding that it was time to "walk the talk". Success on that matter would strengthen the world body while stimulating and renewing confidence in its Charter. "Success breeds success," he noted. On peace and security, he said his country's isolation — surrounded as it was by the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean — no longer shielded it from the threat of international terrorism. Globalization had long had a foothold, and Facebook now linked its people to the world. Quoting from the nation's Constitution, he said: "The seas bring together, they do not separate us. We extend to all nations what we seek from each: peace, friendship, cooperation, and love in our common humanity."

MOHAMED WAHEED, President of the Maldives, expressed support for the ongoing democratization in the Middle East and North Africa, applauding Tunisia and Egypt on having held their first post-transition elections freely and fairly. Welcoming the latest findings of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the human rights situation in Syria, he urged that country's security forces, as well as anti-Government groups, immediately to cease all hostilities and end the violence. Tolerance and mutual respect should prevail among different religions and cultures, he emphasized, strongly condemning the recent video demeaning the Prophet Muhammad. Freedom of expression should not be used as a pretext to insult religions, incite hatred or provoke communal violence, he said, stressing at the same time that violence should not be the response to such "low-level blasphemous acts", and condemning the attacks on the United States consulate in Benghazi. He expressed hope that Palestine would join the United Nations as a full member, and called on all Member State to support the Palestinian people's aspirations and their right to self-determination.

Climate change was the most important, complex development facing small States, he said, citing the threats of sea-level rise, ocean acidification, changes in average temperature, and the "variability of precipitation events". Coastal erosion was a serious problem, affecting more than 113 islands of the Maldives archipelago, he said, adding that another 120 needed emergency water during the dry season. The Government now spent more than 27 per cent of its national budget on building resilience to climate change, he said, reiterating his call for a binding agreement on reducing global carbon emissions. The world could not afford to wait any longer for one. As one of the world's smallest economies, the Maldives contributed just 0.003 per cent of global carbon emissions, but since it was the most vulnerable to climate change, it was taking difficult and bold measures to combat the phenomenon.

One of the first countries to eradicate carbon emissions well ahead of time, the Maldives intended also to lead in eradicating hydrochlorofluorocarbons by 2020 and banning hydrochlorofluorocarbon-based equipment, he said. Many small islands were scaling up renewable energy, not only to avoid spending gross domestic product on imported fossil fuels, but also to reduce harmful emissions, he continued. The Maldives was converting to solar or hybrid sources and 20 of its islands would switch to renewable energy by next year. Such measures were part of a national initiative to transform the economy into a low-carbon one. "If we can take these measures, why can't the larger States, endowed with more resources, take stronger measures?" he asked, calling on carbon-emitting countries to develop and use clean, renewable energy to reduce their carbon footprints.

He said his country's transition to democracy, begun four years ago after its first competitive multi-party presidential election, had been a pressing challenge, particularly over the past eight months. The elected President had resigned in February, claiming later that he had been forced to do so, and the Government had established a commission of inquiry to investigate the allegations. Some States had taken sides in the domestic political crisis, making a bad situation worse, he said, adding that the Maldives now sought, and was receptive to, new ideas, regardless of who provided them. International cooperation should help, not hinder, a country's march towards a better, democratic society, nor should it be used as an excuse to interfere in the domestic politics of small States, which were vulnerable in many ways, he said. Now was the time for large States to help smaller ones by recognizing their unique challenges and reviewing ways in which to extend cooperation to them.

LUIS FEDERICO FRANCO GÓMEZ, President of Paraguay, said he would be addressing the Assembly "for the first and last time" today because he was serving out the presidential mandate of his country's former leader through August 2013. Explaining the events that had led up to his assumption of the presidency, he said that on 22 June, "the history of Paraguay changed forever" as the national Congress, exercising its constitutional powers, unanimously impeached the former President. The legislature had sought to end a very serious political crisis threatening the country — in which 17 Paraguayans had lost their lives — and to avoid further bloodshed and grief, he said, adding that, as standing Vice-President, he had assumed the office of President, as mandated by the Constitution.

He went on to say that since those events, he had governed peacefully and democratically, and the Government took pride in the fact that Paraguay had no political prisoners, no one had been exiled and the freedom of the press and of expression were fully guaranteed. Yet, while the country enjoyed normal diplomatic relations with most other United Nations Member States, it found itself in a "difficult position" created by its neighbours in the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), both of which had imposed sanctions on Paraguay without allowing it the right to defend itself. In violation of international treaties, the two blocs had attempted to become the "custodians of Paraguayan democracy", he said.

Throughout its history, Paraguay had suffered repeatedly as a result of "arrogant intervention in its internal affairs", he continued, noting that none of the Government's detractors had been able to uncover any violations of regional or international treaties and agreements during his short time in office. "Paraguay will never accept intervention by foreign Powers in its internal affairs," he declared.

"We will continue building upon our democracy according to the will of the Paraguayan people, exercised through our elected institutions. Neighbouring countries should reflect on their actions and move to reconstruct the currently compromised South American integration process. "Peace is built through dialogue, to which we are open," he said, adding that when the next President was elected in August 2013, the health and strength of Paraguay's democracy would be confirmed.

Devoting the rest of his address to issues farther afield, he touched on United Nations reform, noting that changes were needed in order to adapt the Organization to current realities. Foremost among them was the gradual elimination of the veto wielded by permanent members of the Security Council. On sustainable development, he stressed that the goals set at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) — better known as the "Earth Summit" — must be "the backbone" of the Organization's work in that area. As the world's largest per capita producer of clean energy, Paraguay would continue to make progress on developing it, he said. Among other issues, he also cited his country's participation in peacekeeping operations, including Paraguayan nationals working under difficult circumstances as military observers in Syria.

BUJAR NISHANI, President of Albania, said that, even though some countries had made progress in their efforts to lift people out of poverty, and to promote democracy, human rights and women's empowerment since the last general debate, many issues remained to be addressed. For example, despite heightened global awareness, the effects of climate change continued to be a threat and the world economy remained worrying. Moreover, threats to peace in some regions showed "how far we still are from achieving desired global security". It was, therefore, reasonable to expect that the United Nations — "the Organization we have placed at the centre of the international architecture" — to be more responsive, efficient, effective and transparent.

He went on to say that over the years, his country had steadily increased its participation in the activities of the United Nations, including peacekeeping operations. Most recently, it had been particularly devoted to the ongoing organizational reform effort and the need to ensure the world body's institutions and mechanisms worked in a more efficient and coherent manner, especially as global needs became more complex. As one of the "Delivering as One" pilot countries, Albania had hosted the fifth high-level conference on the status of that initiative in June, he recalled, noting that the meeting had adopted a solid outcome document that hopefully would provide valuable recommendations in light of the upcoming Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review.

He said he was proud to be from a country known for its openness and tolerance. Indeed, Albanians devoted special attention to those who had come to their country to escape the horrors of war, and had risked their lives to save those in need "knocking at their door". In that light, Albania maintained its strong belief in and support for the dialogue among civilizations, he said, adding that the reckless actions of disruptive groups must not be allowed to derail the genuine efforts of peoples and culture to reach a better understanding of each other. In that regard, he said, while Muslim and Christian Albanians alike had been saddened and angered by the "good for nothing" anti-Muslim video, they had expressed their indignation "by simply ignoring such nonsense".

Regrettably, some parts of the world had not had the same reaction and had instead used the video's release to fuel blind and deadly violence, he continued. The international community must make clear that acts of terrorism or extremism carried out by isolated, ill-intentioned groups should never be confused with the attitudes of entire societies or Governments. "Yet, no legitimate anger can excuse illegitimate violent acts", he emphasized, saying Governments and societies, as well as political and religious leaders, should oppose such actions. Albania condemned the attack against the United States consulate in Benghazi, Libya, as well as any attack against diplomatic premises whose mission was to promote understanding and cooperation among nations.

Closer to home, he recalled that the Balkans had once been a troubled "hotspot" of tension and conflict, but had been profoundly transformed with the birth of six new States of the former Yugoslavia. "We all know it has not been easy and we all know why," he said. However, what mattered most was that the ghosts of the past had led Eastern Europe to new realities and peoples. Kosovo now played an important role in the region's peace and stability, and continued to grow stronger, despite "all kinds of obstacles created by those who still cannot accept reality". While applauding those who had recognized Kosovo's declaration of independence, he denounced "the same old redundant arguments" put forward by Serbia on the matter. Indeed, "what failed to be achieved by war won't be carried out through propaganda either", he said.

MOHAMED YOUSEF EL-MAGARIAF, President of the General National Congress of Libya, apologized for the crimes carried out by the despot who had ruled his country for 42 years, saying Libyans were determined to build a State of peace, security, good relations with their neighbours and respect for international obligations and human rights.

Hailing the late United States Ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, as the “voice of reason and conscience” and “the messenger of peace”, he expressed his deep sadness over the diplomat’s assassination, vowing that the tragedy would strengthen Libya’s solidarity and unity around the aspirations and goals that he had stood for. “We will defeat the schemes of retarded terrorists who do not represent Libya, nor represent Islam”, he stressed, assuring the United States that Libya would pursue the perpetrators and bring them to justice. The Government would spare no effort to bolster protection for diplomatic and consular missions, he added.

The mass demonstrations held in Benghazi and other Libyan cities to condemn that abominable crime illustrated the Libyan people’s rejection of violence and radicalism, he continued, also condemning the denigration campaigns against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Since its February 2011 revolution, Libya had witnessed significant shifts towards ending social injustice and political tyranny, and embracing democracy. In the past few months, it had begun rebuilding State institutions and elected a General National Congress, which would begin drafting a permanent constitution and form the first interim Government following democratic, transparent elections. Political parties had emerged for the first time since independence, he said.

Still, he said, the new Libya was still grappling with serious challenges and security threats caused by illegal activities by the late Muammar Qadhafi’s sons and other members of his regime, as well as by transnational organized crime, terrorism, drug smuggling and human trafficking. To address those ills, Libya had hosted the Regional Ministerial Conference on Border Security in March, which had adopted the Tripoli Action Plan for Border Cooperation. He called on all States to help Libya recover State funds looted by the Qadhafi regime to finance terrorism abroad, and in the fight against corruption.

He said Libya was keen to respect all global accords on disarmament, recalling that in November 2011, the Government had quickly notified the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons about the presence of additional stocks left by the former regime. Libya continued to cooperate with the IAEA, and called for efforts to expedite the formation of a legally binding agreement to ensure the security of non-nuclear States. It supported a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, and called on all States to pressure Israel to commit to that goal. Libya also urged Iran to be more flexible and cooperative with IAEA. It called for urgent action to end Israeli aggression against the Palestinians, for Israel’s withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and for an independent State of Palestine. The Security Council should act promptly to end the violence in Syria while protecting and ensuring that the legitimate demands of the Syrian people were met. He urged the relevant parties to show the political will for genuine United Nations, particularly the Council, in which Africa needed fair representation.

THÉRENCE SINUNGURUZA, Vice-President of Burundi, said his country was in the process of recovery and its people were again finding faith in their destiny. Burundi had organized democratic elections in 2005 and 2010, and had established democratic institutions — including the National Assembly and the Senate — that were largely representative of the population and respected the need for an ethnic and gender balance. The parity in male-female representation in the Senate demonstrated the Government’s efforts to fairly represent women, who made up most of the population, in State institutions, he said.

He said the Government had also created the National Independent Commission on Human Rights and initiated the office of Ombudsman, charged with implementing a zero-tolerance policy in the fight against corruption and embezzlement. In October 2011, it had adopted the National Strategy on Good Governance and the Fight against Corruption for 2011-2015. As a result, high-level Government officials had signed performance contracts, laying the foundation for a culture of accountability. On the basis of those contracts, officials would undergo periodic evaluation, and those meeting the performance criteria would be encouraged while those who did not would be replaced. To create an effective transitional judiciary, the Government had also created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he added.

On the social arena, he said a free education programme had been implemented to allow the enrolment of many children in primary school. Free medical assistance, for pregnant women and children up to the age of 5 years, had improved maternal and children’s health, which would help bring Burundi closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Additionally, 2,024 schools, 80 health centres and more than 2,000 drinking-water fountains had been built over the last three years, and Burundi continued its efforts to improve its economic infrastructure, public financial management and business climate. Significant progress had also been made on the return of displaced persons and refugees, he said. Security was a prerequisite for social and economic progress, he said, emphasizing Burundi’s commitment to pursuing reform in that regard so as to ensure professionalism in the security forces and prison services.

He said an interministerial committee had been formed to develop a national strategy on regional integration, and Burundi was organizing a conference for development partners, to be held in Geneva next month. As for international affairs, Burundi had been one of two countries in the world to participate in the initial African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Expressing support for the recent adoption of that country's provisional Constitution, he said the election of a new President was another significant step towards peace and national reconciliation there. Burundi would deploy more than 200 police officers to help maintain security and help to form the Somali police force, he added. Concerning Mali, it was to be hoped that the interim Government would soon find a solution to the crisis dividing that country.

As for Syria, Burundi hoped for a prompt restoration of peace in the country, with the concerted efforts of all parties involved, as well as the international community, he said. Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he affirmed his country's commitment, alongside other members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to the terms of the Organizational Protocol on Security, Stability and Development, as well as to the declaration signed by Heads of State and Government in July 2012 and August-September 2012. Burundi remained committed to seeking creative solutions in that conflict through existing regional mechanisms and in line with the decisions already taken by countries of the subregion, he said.

DANNY FAURE, Vice-President of Seychelles, said he was particularly concerned about the continuing challenge of maritime piracy, and a resolution of the political crisis in Madagascar. Piracy fundamentally altered "our relationship with our ocean" while instilling fear and uncertainty, he said, noting that two of his compatriots were still held captive in Somalia. "As long as they remain separated from their families, our ocean represents risk for our nation rather than the opportunity that it should." Establishing the rule of law in Somalia was obviously the only true long-term and sustainable solution to piracy, he said.

He went on to say that his country was already working with Somalia's central Government and the autonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland in seeking the transfer of prisoners convicted of piracy to their countries of origin, where they serve their sentences. However, more resources were to accelerate the construction of appropriate infrastructure in those parts of Somalia where stability had been established. He said his Government and that of the United Kingdom, as well as other international partners, were in the process of setting up a regional anti-piracy prosecution and intelligence centre in Seychelles.

Turning to the crisis in Madagascar, he described it as a difficult trial for that country. The Seychelles continued to work for implementation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) road map in that regard, and had hosted two meetings between former president Marc Ravalomanana and the President of the Transition, Andry Rajoelina. Those talks had generated a series of useful and relevant tools for restoring order in Madagascar, including an electoral timeline, he said, expressing thanks to the Transitional Government of Madagascar, which had provided the budget for the elections.

On the delimitation of maritime boundaries, he said that, "as an island State, we are conscious that the ocean must connect us and not divide us". This year, Seychelles and Mauritius had agreed for the first time in the history of the United Nations on the joint management of a 300,000 square-kilometre extended continental shelf, which meant that the two small island developing States would be sharing that space for the development benefit of their two peoples. Additionally, Seychelles had recently announced its intention to stand for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in 2017, subject to endorsement by the African Union, he noted. As one of the continent's smallest nations, it understood keenly the need to fight for its economic independence. "Now more than ever, we need to invest in Africa's economic freedom," he declared, adding: "We must create the means by which Africa's share of trade and financial power can increase at a faster rate."

KHUDIER ALKHUZAE, Vice-President of Iraq, said his country's fast-growing economy would enable it to return to the world economy having seen its gross domestic product (GDP) double, as had GDP per capita. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), GDP would reach \$150 billion in 2014, he said, adding that Government policies had succeeded in curbing inflation and controlling spending, as well as the accumulated external debt. The national development plan focused on balanced growth, driven by the oil sector, he said, noting that Iraq had reserves of about 143 billion barrels and potential reserves estimated to surpass the proven ones, in addition to some \$126.7 trillion in large natural gas reserves. Investments would help substantially develop the oil industry through licensing rounds and the establishment of refineries and other oil- and gas-related industries, he said, noting that production was expected to reach 10 million barrels per day between 2017 and 2020.

He said his country honoured the principles of rule of law, an independent judiciary and freedom of expression, he said. "We proudly announce to you that we don't have a single prisoner

jailed for his belief or opinion," he declared. "Despite our fight against terrorism, human rights are principles that we respect and promote as a just cause that we do not have any justification to tamper with." Since Iraq wished to spare its people the ravages of conflict, it hoped other countries would remember its experience and spare their peoples the havoc of terrorism, which could be achieved by adopting the principle of negotiation to resolve conflicts, and resorting to dialogue, reason, law and the peaceful transfer of power. "That is the essence of Iraq's position regarding the Arab Spring's revolutions," he said, adding that his country remained on the side of the people and their legitimate aspirations.

Turning to Syria, he said that providing belligerent parties with weapons was dangerous and led to greater violence, endangering Syria's very social fabric, he warned. "The events in Syria prove that solving the crisis by violence and force could double the costs incurred by the Syrians and the region as such means only increase the suffering of civilians, destroy infrastructure and augment the number of the displaced," he said, expressing hope that all parties would realize the danger of betting on a military solution. Expressing support for a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital and United Nations membership, he "unequivocally" rejected Israel's policies of repression, Judaization and usurpation of land, its disregard for international calls to end its unjust practices, and its refusal to place its nuclear installations and arsenal under IAEA monitoring. However, Iraq favoured the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

Looking beyond the region, he condemned the discriminatory policies practised against religious and ethnic minorities, deploring human rights violations against Muslims in Myanmar, who faced a genocide about which the world should not remain silent. Concerning the repulsive insults against the Prophet of Islam following the Internet release of a "trivial" movie, he said the subsequent violent reactions that had almost rocked relations between East and West required the world's attention. He called for an international ban criminalizing anyone who insulted religions, disrespected religious symbols or insulted the great prophets and messengers. "The recurrence of these obscene actions will supply terrorists with excellent material to attract angry youth and use them in violent actions that threaten peace and security, in which many victims could fall, similar to what happened recently," he warned.

RIEK MACHAR TENY-DHURGON, Vice-President of South Sudan, while offering thanks to all those who had helped his country gain independence, "not the least the United Nations," said independence had not, however, resolved all the issues between South Sudan and Sudan, including those relating to border demarcation, oil infrastructure, security and the final status of the disputed area of Abyei. At the same time, South Sudan had begun to lay the foundation for a prosperous, democratic and stable nation by establishing institutions for governance and service delivery at all levels. It was working for food security and economic diversity by using its oil revenues to develop agriculture and build basic infrastructure.

Reforms had been carried out in the delivery of services, as well as public financial management, he continued. Primary school enrolment had more than doubled since 2005, and alternative accelerated learning was offered to more than 200,000 youths and adults. Terms of service for teachers had been improved and tireless efforts were being made to meet the rapidly increasing demand for secondary education. However, much more had to be done, he said. "Our nascent nation had been tested enormously in its first year of independence." Apart from conflict, it suffered severe economic hardship and abuse of public funds. The Government was taking serious measures to correct the latter and restore public confidence. It was also combating corruption through management reforms, the rule of law and improved accountability and transparency, in order to bring the management of resources closer to international standards.

At the same time, armed militia groups were undermining the new country, and the Government had accorded high priority to reaching peaceful resolutions to internal conflicts, he said. Four groups had already laid down their arms and had integrated voluntarily into the national army or civilian life. As for tensions with Sudan, he recounted the events leading up to the oil shut-down, stating that Sudan had blocked export shipments from Port Sudan and seized his country's crude. South Sudan had temporarily taken over the area of Heglig in April to prevent it from being used as a launching pad for military attacks against its territory. It had withdrawn soon after, "in compliance with advice from the international community", and the matter should be settled through peaceful negotiations.

Regarding his Government's alleged support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N), he said that was "misunderstood". The South Sudanese fighters of the original SPLA had fought side by side with their northern comrades, but each had had its own objectives. Since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement's provisions on South Kordofan and Blue Nile States had not been credibly implemented, South Sudan had the obligation to help the SPLA-N address its legitimate grievance, as stipulated by the pact. It was shouldering the burden of an increasing number of refugees

from the two States, he said, calling for humanitarian assistance to meet their needs. However, South Sudan would use its good offices as a former ally of SPLA-N to help mediate a peaceful and just resolution of the conflict.

He went on to announce that today the Presidents of South Sudan and Sudan had signed an agreement that, if upheld by both parties, would amicably resolve the most significant causes of the disputes between them. It addressed oil and related economic matters, the status of nationals of the other State, boundary demarcation, other border issues, banking cooperation, trade-related issues, the division of assets and liabilities, and the facilitation of post-service benefits. However, agreement on Abyei had not been reached, with Sudan having rejected the recommendations of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, he said. It was now incumbent upon the regional body and the Security Council "to take the necessary action for the way forward".

WINSTON BALDWIN SPENCER, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, recalled that the world had celebrated the International Year for Peoples of African Descent in 2011. That year had passed, and so, too, had gone from the international agenda the issue of reparations for slavery, which was central to fighting racism and racial discrimination, and nurturing a culture of peace among nations. "The legacy of racial violence, segregation and slavery against peoples of African descent has severely impaired our advancement as nations, communities and individuals across the political, social and, most importantly, the economic spectra," he said. In the words of Ghana's independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, he added: "We can no longer afford the luxury of delay," reiterating a call made last year for former slave-holding States to begin the reconciliation process by issuing formal apologies for the crimes committed over the 400 years of the African slave trade.

Turning to transnational crime, which was threatening in his country, he said that its size and lack of human or financial resources made it difficult for Antigua and Barbuda to address that impediment effectively. The crime and violence fuelled by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons was jeopardizing industries such as tourism, while health-care systems were weighed down and families were being torn apart. Crime prevention and small arms control was, therefore, a priority. It was important to note that neither Antigua and Barbuda nor other Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations manufactured arms, yet one estimate indicated that there were some 1.6 million illegal firearms in the region. Similarly, the dangers posed by non-State actors acquiring weapons of mass destruction was real, and should be seen by all countries, large and small, as the single most destructive element to international peace and security, he continued. Antigua and Barbuda was particularly concerned about lack of progress in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. "There should be no compromise on this issue," he stressed, calling once again for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Concerning climate change, he said that during the recently concluded Summit of the Alliance of Small Island States, his country had joined others in sending the strongest message yet to the international community on the need for bold and ambitious action. "We cannot wait for our lands to disappear before we act," he emphasized. "We must act now to respond to the climate crisis, and ensure that not a single country is sacrificed, no matter how small." Indeed, the threat was real, he said, citing rising sea levels, coral bleaching, as well as increasingly frequent and severe hurricanes. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change must take concrete steps to protect small islands and other exposed countries from the threat of climate change, he said, joining other Alliance of Small Island States member States in calling upon the Assembly to designate 2014 as the International Year of Small Island Developing States in order to raise awareness of their special situation and mobilize international support for their sustainable development.

Emphasizing that economic prosperity should be shared equally among and within countries, he said the "exclusive clubs" of the G-8 and the G-20 could not repair the fragmented international financial system without duly considering the majority of nations "left on the outside with much to offer". Antigua and Barbuda called on the developed world and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries to guarantee that their approach to international tax matters would involve improved cooperation through comprehensive and supportive frameworks that ensured the involvement and equal treatment of small jurisdictions, without such nuances of inappropriate branding as "tax havens". Years after the World Trade Organization (WTO) had found in favour of his country in a dispute involving the gaming sector, the country was still engaged in negotiations with the United States, he noted, calling on that country quickly to resolve the matter and arrive at a fair and just settlement.

NAJIB MIKATI, Prime Minister of Lebanon, said that at a time of legitimate Arab demands for reform and change, their goals would only be met through dialogue rather than violence and foreign interference, he said. Regarding the Syrian crisis, Lebanon could not alone handle the increasing number of refugees displaced by the conflict, he said, calling for international assistance and efforts to ensure a political consensus on ending the violence, which claimed hundreds of lives each day. As for the question of Palestine, Lebanon supported the people's right to return to their homeland and to have

an independent State, he said adding that recognition and acceptance of such a State as a full United Nations member should pave the way for a just political settlement of the Palestinian cause and end the historical injustice the Palestinian people had suffered since 1948.

Committed to peace in south Lebanon, he reaffirmed his country's commitment to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), pointing out, however, that Israel had committed more than 9,000 violations of Lebanese sovereignty and territory since 2006. Its actions imposed limits on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and its freedom of action while threatening the security of its members, he said, appealing to the international community to exert pressure to ensure that Israel respected international resolutions and international law. He also called for full implementation of General Assembly resolution 192/66 on the oil spill caused by the 2006 Israeli war on his country, adding that Lebanon remained committed to defending its exclusive economic area and maritime borders, as set by international law.

Lebanon was a crossroads of religion, communities, cultures and civilizations committed to religious and human values, freedom of speech, tolerance, dialogue, diversity and integration, he said. Building confidence and fostering mutual understanding was essential to ending violations of religious symbols once and for all. Committed to regional peace, Lebanon wished to see elimination of weapons of mass destruction, he said, noting that Israel was the only country in the region to possess such arms, and that following its creation in 1948, that country had persisted in violations of international law. "Stability cannot occur without a Palestinian Spring through the full implementation of the Palestinian right to self-determination on their land," he stressed.

"The Arab world is witnessing one of the most sensitive periods of its modern history," he continued. "We have reached a point where communities must make choices that will translate their ambitions into reality." Lebanon had proven itself as an example of a democratic, tolerant and pluralistic country, and it was the international community's duty to insulate it from the turbulent region around it, he said. "For it is only then that you would be providing our unstable region with a real source of inspiration: a viable nation and a vibrant one, full of life and a model for civil and religious liberties, social diversity and political freedoms." He urged the international community to see Lebanon not as a responsibility, but as an opportunity to provide the safest and fastest way towards all that the Middle East could be — democratic, peaceful and prosperous.

SHEIKH HASINA, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, said the complex challenges the world faced demanded collective efforts towards peaceful solutions taken under the auspices of the United Nations. As such, the theme of the general debate — the peaceful settlement of disputes — was welcomed, she said, noting that that principle had inspired her to continue pressing for full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord. It was also possible that she could peacefully settle the 2009 "border guards mutiny", thus averting a "dangerous crisis". As for external relations, she said she had resolved a long-standing dispute with India over water-sharing along the River Ganges, and a 41-year-old maritime boundary dispute with Myanmar through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

She went in to say that her country's commitment to peace had been further demonstrated, including as one of the top contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations and one of the founding members of the Peacebuilding Commission. She said that in four decades in politics, she had learned that peace prevailed when justice prevailed. Justice, which was vital for development, was only possible through democracy. People must be empowered or else societies would be burdened by social injustice, poverty and inequality. To that end, Bangladesh was empowering its people by eradicating poverty and deprivation, while providing social safety nets, creating jobs and promoting sustained growth and human development.

Recalling that she had presented her country's "People's Empowerment and Development" strategy at the 2011 general debate, and in Dhaka, last month, she said the initiative had received the support of 62 countries. For its part, Bangladesh had set up Parliamentary Standing Committees in 2008 charged with dealing with specific issues. Some of them were chaired by opposition Members of Parliament, she said, adding that Bangladesh had also removed media controls and expanded the number of privately held television channels. It was also pressing ahead with a regional connectivity scheme.

Measures to empower societies should include strong elements of gender equality and women's empowerment, she said, adding that Bangladesh was providing free primary education for girls under its new national education policy. Over the past four years, the country had also bolstered women's political participation, with nearly 13,000 women having been elected to local governing bodies and 69 to women Members of Parliament. Five Cabinet members were women, and overall, 30 per cent of all general Government posts, including in the judiciary, were reserved for women. All such empowerment efforts had helped reduce poverty by some 10 per cent, enhanced per capita income by 34 per cent and dramatically reduced what had been double-digit inflation, she said.

While the country's achievements had earned global recognition, some of its forward progress had been hindered by the impacts of climate change, such as property loss and population displacement, she said, recalling that three years ago, she had called for a more just climate regime to deal with sea-level rise and the economic rehabilitation of "climate migrants". Today, she reiterated her call for an international agreement on greenhouse gas emissions based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Noting that terrorism could derail a country's progress, she said Bangladesh had suffered its share of terrorist incidents from 2001 to 2006, pointing out that she had herself been the target of a grenade attack in 2004 that had killed 42 people and wounded some 500 others. The Government had adopted a "zero-tolerance" policy on all forms of extremism.

YINGLUCK SHINAWATRA, Prime Minister of Thailand, said economic development must go hand in hand with political advancement, emphasizing three points. First, an inclusive national development strategy was vital. It was important to place people at the front and centre of the development agenda, while sustainable growth and development, poverty reduction, addressing climate change and environmental challenges, and promoting greater employment must also go together.

Second, an inclusive regional development would strengthen regional peace and security. In South-east Asia, that was the spirit that was driving 10 members of ASEAN to establish an ASEAN Community by the year 2015. As it moved towards greater integration, efforts were being made to close development gaps and expand connectivity across the region and beyond, into the wider East Asia and South Asia. "That could help spread the fruits of development and growth wider across the continent," she said.

Third, an inclusive global process was crucial as the international community considered the post-2015 development agenda, she continued. With the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goal fast approaching, the international community should mobilize an all-out effort to make the final push towards realizing those targets, she stressed. At the same time, it was important to prepare for the post-2015 era. The successes and failures of the Millennium Development Goals should be taken into account as the Sustainable Development Goals were elaborated.

"We live in a world of increasing inter-connectivity, but our peoples continue to face insecurity from cross-border challenges," she said. In the age of globalization, the concept of security must be people-centred. Therefore, transnational challenges — from people-smuggling to human trafficking, from narcotics to pandemics, from natural disasters to illegal trade in arms and weapons of mass destruction materials — must rank high on national agendas, she said, urging the international community to redouble its collective efforts to act forcefully against transnational crimes. There was no doubt that human trafficking was one of the worst forms of human indignity. Bangladesh was fully committed to eliminating such inhumane exploitation.

However, whether it was human trafficking or other transnational crimes, she said, the key was to ensure that the rule of law prevailed and that people's basic rights were guaranteed, especially those of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Solutions to those challenges could not be achieved by Governments alone. Efforts were needed on the part of all stakeholders, especially in strengthening international norms and standards. Through the United Nations, "we need to promote the rule of law as a solid foundation to achieve peace, international security, human rights and sustainable development", she said.

GORDON DARCY LILO, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, said new cold war lines were being drawn and low-intensity territorial disputes were brewing in the Asia-Pacific region, and demanded effective multilateral institutions to respond meaningfully by upholding the rule of law. Recalling that his country had emerged from an internal conflict some 10 years ago, he said some socio-economic progress had been made since the restoration of stability, with steady economic growth in the past five years, external reserves increasing, recognition by the World Bank for improved ease of doing business and efforts to buffer the economy from shocks. In addition, malaria had been eradicated from two provinces, infant and maternal mortality had decreased significantly and health centres were being funded. There had also been a reduction in major crime and a safer environment had been created. The Islands had hosted a number of international events in sports, arts and politics. "We have regained our image of the country known as the 'Happy Isles'," he said, pointing out that the Government was working with partners to ensure a smooth transition from the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands.

Welcoming ongoing intergovernmental processes to strengthen human-rights treaty bodies, he said double standards and the politicization of human rights must be eliminated. The Solomon Islands supported a major United Nations role in resolving all situations of conflict in the Middle East, including advancing a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. He expressed deep concern over the recent sad events in Benghazi. He expressed support for New Caledonia's aspirations to self-

determination and encouraged all efforts to enable its indigenous Kanak people to assume leadership in determining their own future. He also joined regional neighbours in supporting the re-inscription of French Polynesia on the United Nations decolonization list. Welcoming Assembly efforts to smooth the transition process for countries graduating from the least-developed category, he said his own country was pursuing high-value investments in that regard and taking steps to maximize returns from natural resources.

Reiterating the urgent need to deal with climate change as an irreversible threat to humanity, he said mitigation must be prioritized at meaningful levels, and called for determined efforts to ensure temperatures did not rise by more than 1.5° Celsius, in order to ensure the survival and viability of small island developing States and least developed countries. He expressed deep regret that some countries had opted out of the Kyoto Protocol, while others stalled on a second commitment. On the other hand, the Solomon Islands had launched its national climate change policy, which was mainstreamed into all sectors. It was also looking to ensure that its rich diversity was on the global agenda. Finally, he called for Security Council reform, international engagement with Taiwan and the lifting of the embargo against Cuba.

ASYLBEK JEENBEKOV, Speaker of Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, condemned the provocative nature of the *Innocence of Muslims* video which denigrated Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, while also rejecting violence and the use of force against diplomats of any country. Noting that the world was changing as information spread faster, he said local events could have an impact on global processes. He expressed serious concern over the situation in Syria, and called for a quick end to the violence and the start of a broad political dialogue that would include all parties.

He expressed concern over the situation in Afghanistan, and the emergence of various extremist and terrorist groups there, saying neighbouring countries had worked to foster investment, trade and communications ties with that country. Kyrgyzstan was helping to deliver supplies to Afghanistan through its cargo transit centre at the Manas International Airport. NATO and other forces partnering with Afghanistan must bring their work to fruition so that the country could take responsibility for its own security and stability, he stressed, adding that the international community must do its utmost to rehabilitate Afghanistan economically, including through joint socio-economic projects. Kyrgyzstan was doing its part by expanding economic and trade ties, and was poised to export electricity.

Underscoring the need to eradicate opium production in Afghanistan, he said the deadly crop was harming neighbouring Asian countries, which were also becoming end-users. The opium trade spawned corruption, eroded State systems and led to crime. The international community must provide technical, economic and other forms of support to help Afghanistan and neighbouring Asian countries stem the drug trade, he said, emphasizing that the United Nations must be on the front line of efforts to tackle such challenges. He also called for reforming the Security Council to make it more geographically representative, transparent and democratic, and for strengthening the coordinating role of the Economic and Social Council in sustainable development, food security, humanitarian aid, environmental cooperation and the Millennium Development Goals.

Despite aid from global financial institutions, developing mountain States grappled with high foreign debt and transport costs, inhibiting their ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, he said, calling for United Nations support for his country's efforts to ensure that its foreign debt was written off so it could carry out sustainable development projects. Since the April 2010 revolution, the country had worked to implement democratic governance and a parliamentary democracy, clamp down on corruption, including among senior Government officials, and prosecute organized criminals, he said, calling on Belarus to extradite former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev and his brother Janysh.

Since adopting a new constitution in 2011, Kyrgyzstan had set up a host of Government institutions and transparent mechanisms to select judges of the Supreme Court and other courts, he said. It was working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other global agencies to develop a just legal system. The country also needed international aid to tackle its high foreign debt and institute comprehensive reforms. Kyrgyzstan had a strong metallurgical industry, a skilled labour force in the energy sector, inexpensive electricity, and huge hydro-energy potential, he pointed out, noting that it had broken ground on one of most ambitious clean-electricity generation projects in Central Asia, which would supply potable water to neighbouring countries.

ABDIWELI MOHAMED ALI, Prime Minister of Somalia, said that just over two weeks ago, his country had taken a bold and decisive step away from decades of division, disorder and conflict, towards the reconstitution of a more representative, more democratic Somali republic at peace with itself, its neighbours and the rest of the world. Over more than two decades of crisis, the Somali people had suffered and endured, but they had not done so alone. "The United Nations have stood by us, providing humanitarian assistance to those of our people in need, helping us to rebuild from the ruins of

war, bringing us time and again to the negotiating table to resolve our differences, and maintaining the dignity of the Somali nation by keeping our flag flying through these long, dark years.”

Paying tribute to all those involved in bringing that about, including Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Representative, he acknowledged that his country's progress was also due in great measure to the selfless courage and sacrifice of African Union member States. With support from AMISOM and other partners, Somalia's Armed Forces were becoming increasingly experienced and capable. But the country would need AMISOM's steadfast presence and mentoring for some time to come, he acknowledged, calling upon the African Union to renew its commitment as the country moved towards full resumption of its responsibilities.

Members of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation had also extended their support during Somalia's difficult times, he said, adding that he was especially grateful to the Government and people of Turkey for their “courage and leadership” in ending Somalia's long isolation. The end of Somalia's transition had come about through the immense efforts of the Transitional Federal Government, Somali regional administrations, civil society and traditional leaders, he noted, pointing out that, against all odds, Somalis were able to adopt a new provisional constitution, create a new Parliament and elect a new President within one year, heralding the beginning of a new era. The country's transition had officially ended, but the work of rebuilding the nation continued, he said, noting that the new Administration had four short years to translate paper agreements and objectives into concrete, tangible progress, while placing Somalia firmly on an irreversible path to enduring peace and growing prosperity.

The most urgent challenge was restoring peace and security throughout Somali territory, he declared, emphasizing that power and responsibility must be devolved as close to the people as possible, in accordance with the principles of federalism. The new Administration had repeatedly extended olive branches to its adversaries and, although they had been repeatedly rejected, the new President would continue to reach out and offer peace. To Al-Shabaab, a complex and heterogeneous movement whose members were mostly ordinary citizens who had aligned themselves with the group out of fear or a sense of grievance, he said the new Government would continue to say, as it had done in the past: “Brothers and sisters, lay down your arms and let us talk.” To those “few ideological extremists” in the group's ranks who remained committed to terror and the murder of innocents to achieve their aims, there was no place in Somalia or the international society for them and their violent creed.

As Somalia moved away from transitional government into an era of permanent government, it was necessary to establish a new compact for national coexistence in which the aspirations of all Somalis would be reflected, he stressed. The durability of national stabilization efforts would depend largely on Somalia's ability to revive and develop the economy. Recognizing that the country's problems had spilled far beyond its borders, he said foreign countries had taken in hundreds of thousands of Somalis fleeing the crisis at home, at considerable sacrifice to their own citizens, while Somali pirates had become the scourge of shipping far from their country's shores. Furthermore, extremists from across the world had used Somali territory as a base from which to plan and launch attacks against foreign countries. Therefore, as Somalia reclaimed its status as a full member of the international community, it must acknowledge its responsibility as a nation, both for the proliferation of those problems and for their eventual resolution, he said.

RASHID MEREDOV, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, said energy security was a basic condition for stable and conflict-free development. As a leading supplier of energy resources with the world's fourth-largest hydrocarbon reserves, Turkmenistan, responsibly and consistently called for the establishment of a stable and reliable international energy supply system. There was a need to adopt consensus United Nations decisions which would serve as a basis for the creation of universal political and legal mechanisms governing global energy cooperation, he said, urging Member States to consider the creation of an international legal framework to govern the energy supply system, taking into due consideration the interests of hydrocarbon producers, as well as transit and recipient nations. As a first step, it would be appropriate to prepare, during the present session, a draft General Assembly resolution on the establishment of an expert group tasked with developing an appropriate multilateral document.

He said his country had announced its candidacy for membership of the Economic and Social Council for 2013-2015. The decision was based on current political, socio-economic and cultural realities, as well as on the nation's active role in international processes, and its understanding of the responsibilities inherent in membership of that Council. Turkmenistan intended to use all available means to improve international cooperation for the effective implementation of sustainable development goals, he said. The most important element of modern international relations was cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, he said, proposing that the United Nations include international humanitarian issues as a separate item on its agenda. Turkmenistan proposed the development of a United Nations

platform of action for humanitarian affairs, designed to form the political and legal basis for consolidating the international community's efforts in that field. Such a holistic approach would help stimulate the activities of the relevant United Nations agencies and develop long-term solutions, in line with international law and General Assembly resolutions, while ensuring implementation of United Nations conventions in the humanitarian sphere, he said.

DIMITRIS L. AVRAMOPOULOS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, said his Government had decided to bid for membership on the Human Rights Council during 2013-2015 to enhance international cooperation on the promotion and protection of human rights. He said the "name" issue involving Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was, beyond its semantic dimension, "an important piece in the puzzle of putting to rest irredentist notions and attempts to rewrite history in our region". Pointing out that he had been informed of what the representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had said in the General Assembly today, he declared: "Distorting reality in front of the entire international community and using nineteenth-century rhetoric in the twenty-first century was counterproductive and will lead us nowhere." He added: "Populism and nationalism is the worst possible mix for the promotion of anyone's national interests and the stability of our region."

He stressed that the solution lay in a fair settlement, "a name with a geographical qualifier, since Macedonia is a geographical region that overlaps the territories of three countries, the largest part in Greece and then Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". The name must be used in relation to everyone, he said, adding that resolving the issue would help realize the vast potential in "our relations", to "our mutual benefit". Such a scenario would lead Greece to be the staunchest ally and friend of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in its efforts to realize its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Greece was also consistently pursuing stronger cooperation with Turkey, he continued, expressing support for that country's candidacy for full European Union membership, on condition that it met all relevant membership criteria and carried out the necessary reforms. It was of the utmost importance that Turkey gave tangible signs of full respect for international law and abandon attitudes like its standing threat against Greece, or its attitude towards Cyprus, which undermined efforts to build trust. Greece supported the efforts of Cyprus to pursue negotiations with the Turkish Cypriot community, under United Nations auspices, with the ultimate aim of reuniting the island. He applauded the decision by Cyprus to act on its sovereign right to exploit natural gas deposits in its exclusive economic zone.

On his country's economic crisis, he said the new tripartite coalition Government was implementing an ambitious economic adjustment programme to improve the country's macroeconomic outlook and achieve fiscal adjustment, while at the same time addressing structural reforms aimed at promoting growth and creating jobs. That effort had produced impressive results, he said, noting that the primary deficit had been significantly reduced. The business and investment climate was on a positive path, he added. While the Greek people were suffering tremendously under the nation's austerity programme, a broader view showed that the crisis was not just Greek or European, but global in scope. In the 3,000 years of their history, the Greek people had known "crises more serious than the present one", he said, declaring: "We survived, and excelled." He added: "Let me assure the General Assembly and the family of nations that Greece will make it."

YANG JIECHI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, said that, in its pursuit of peace and development amid a global financial crisis and regional conflicts, the international community should "act like passengers who stick together in a boat when crossing a torrential river, and seek win-win progress through cooperation". On regional conflicts, he expressed his country's respect and support for efforts by countries in West Asia and North Africa to handle their internal affairs independently, as well as the calls of their citizens for change and development. Expressing deep concern about the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the economic and humanitarian difficulties facing the Palestinian people, he reiterated China's support for the creation of an independent Palestinian State, enjoying full sovereignty and with East Jerusalem as its capital. China also supported Palestine's membership in the United Nations and other international organizations.

Troubled by the persistent tension and worsening humanitarian situation in Syria, he called on all relevant parties immediately to cease fighting and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, the six-point plan, and the communiqué of the meeting of foreign ministers of the Action Group for Syria, in addition to launching an inclusive political dialogue and a Syrian-led political transition as soon as possible. As for the Iranian nuclear issue, he said it had reached a critical new stage, and the parties concerned should remain committed to a diplomatic solution and begin a new round of dialogue as soon as possible. China had always supported efforts to uphold the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, and would continue to play a constructive role in seeking a peaceful solution.

China remained committed to building peace and security not only in the Asia-Pacific region, but across the globe, he said, adding that his country was focused on sharing development opportunities with other countries, and would stay on the track of peaceful development. It had contributed a total of about 21,000 personnel to United Nations peacekeeping missions and had taken an active part in international cooperation on counter-terrorism, anti-piracy and non-proliferation. It had also actively expanded its exchanges with neighbouring countries, contributing to more than 50 per cent of Asia's growth for many consecutive years. By the end of 2011, the Government had built more than 2,200 projects in those countries, and had cancelled the debts owed to it by 50 heavily indebted poor countries and least developed countries. It had trained more than 60,000 personnel in various sectors for 173 developing countries and 13 regional and international organizations — significant contributions to the economic and social progress of other developing countries, he said.

Despite a challenging economic environment both at home and abroad, China had registered a GDP growth rate of 9.3 per cent and had made good progress in adjusting its economic structure and improving its people's lives, he said. Since the beginning of 2012, the Government had accelerated its "anticipatory fine-tuning" of the economy and introduced a series of targeted policy measures. That had boosted market confidence and ensured steady growth, he said. Confident that his country had the means and ability to maintain steady and robust growth, he said its domestic market would be among the world's largest during its twelfth Five-Year Plan period (2011-2015), with total imports expected to exceed \$10 trillion and direct outbound investment expected to surpass the \$500 billion mark. That would create enormous business and job opportunities for the world and provide good opportunities for development in other countries.

Concerning Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands, he said they had been an integral part of China's territory since ancient times, and its claim was based on indisputable historical and legal evidence. Japan had seized the islands in 1895 at the end of the Sino-Japanese War, and had forced the then Chinese Government to sign an unequal treaty ceding the islands and other Chinese territories. He said that by taking such unilateral actions as the so-called "island purchase", the Japanese Government had grossly violated China's sovereignty, and strongly urged Japan to "immediately stop all activities that violate China's territorial sovereignty, take concrete actions to correct its mistakes and return to the track of resolving the dispute through negotiation".

ESPEN BARTH EIDE, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, said "leadership is about making choices", adding "leadership is also about creating the conditions for people to choose how to live their lives". Freedom was more than the mere absence of physical or legal obstacles, he continued, recalling that the purpose of the United Nations was to promote freedom for all — freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom to live in dignity. The crisis in Syria had begun with peaceful protests calling for freedom and dignity. The Syrian Government bore primary responsibility, and the privileges of the few should no longer stand in the way of the aspirations of the many. "Even in war there are rules," he pointed out. "Do not expect to be pardoned by stating that your opponent did the same."

At the founding of the United Nations in 1945, it had been decided to establish a Security Council to act on behalf of Member States, he said. Norway's delegation, at that time led by Trygve Lie — later to become the Organization's first Secretary-General — had voted in favour of the right of veto, as had many other small and medium-sized countries. They had done so in order to reflect the world order of the day, but also to ensure that the Council would actually have the authority to make decisions and act "on our behalf". They had done so not to hold certain States as superior to others, he stressed. Noting the current deadlock in the Council, he said: "Now we expect you to act. We expect you to put away outdated ideas of zero-sum games and spheres of influence and to strive to seek a common position. Enough blood has been shed."

While welcoming some positive developments concerning conflicts in Myanmar, Sudan-South Sudan and Colombia, he expressed concern about the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Noting that he was Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Support to the Palestinian Authority, he recalled that exactly one year ago, it had been agreed in New York that the Palestinian State-building process had reached "a level where the institutions of State are in place". However, "great expectations were created, only to be frustrated", he said, adding: "Time is running short, shorter than many seem to understand." A two-State solution was the only path to sustainable peace, he emphasized, adding that negotiations remained the key. A strong United Nations was needed to international goals, he said, pointing out that intergovernmental micromanagement of what would be the Chief Executive's prerogative in any modern organization was the opposite of making the Organization work. "Leaders have real choices," he noted.

KHALID BIN AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL KHALIFA, Foreign Minister of Bahrain, said that, since 2011, serious challenges to his country's security and stability had arisen. The Government had created the Bahraini Independent Commission of Investigation "to establish the truth and give each person his or her due". King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa had also proposed the creation of an Arab court of human rights to lay down the foundations of an enabling environment for human rights and to protect

those rights in the Arab world. It would be modelled on the Inter-America Court of Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Council of the Arab League had endorsed that historic initiative and arrangements were currently under way to set forth the legal basis for establishing the court, which hopefully would become a reality very soon.

The United Nations had an indispensable role in addressing international and regional problems and finding appropriate solutions, he said. The Arab world was now in great need of that role, given the speedy and regrettable developments in Syria. The international community, represented in the United Nations and its entities, entrusted with maintaining international peace and security, was called upon to unify its position and end the suffering of the Syrian people, and to find a political solution to the crisis that would bring an end to the violence and bloodshed. The Organization must, therefore, shoulder its responsibility to protect unarmed civilians and not allow its own procedures to impede its ability to prevent crimes against humanity, he emphasized.

Even though the Syrian crisis was currently the international community's main concern, the Palestinian question remained the core issue in the Middle East, he said. It was imperative to redouble efforts for a just, durable and comprehensive solution, notably through the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Arab Peace Initiative and the decisions of the Middle East Quartet. The international community should, therefore, demand that Israel halt its settlement-construction which was jeopardizing the chances for peace. He also stressed the necessity of implementing General Assembly and Security Council resolutions by taking practical action to halt Israeli violations and aggression and ensure its observance of the principles of international legitimacy.

Israel should also adhere to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subject its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspection, he continued. On the other hand, Iran must fulfil its commitment to total and transparent cooperation with the Agency, he stressed. That country had lately been reiterating menacing threats aimed at members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, contradicting the spirit of good-neighbourliness, and thereby generating tensions and suspicions in the region. More importantly, Bahrain reaffirmed the necessity of resolving the problem of the three United Arab Emirates islands occupied by Iran — of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb — either through direct negotiations or arbitration by the International Court of Justice.

EDOUARD NIANKOYE LAMA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea, said the strengthening of democratic institutions and the re-establishment of territorial integrity were major challenges that must be met in West Africa, particularly in Mali, the northern part of which had been occupied for several months by terrorist groups and rebels. He reiterated Guinea's support for the initiatives of ECOWAS and the African Union in pursuit of solutions to that crisis, stressing that its consequences could be devastating to other countries in the subregion. In that regard, Guinea supported Mali's request to the Security Council for the rapid deployment of an international force to restore its territorial integrity.

He said his country also supported efforts to restore peace and security to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was essential to the stability of that country, as well as the region. In the Horn of Africa, progress on the Somali peace process had been encouraging, he said, adding that the creation of the federal Parliament, the adoption of the intermediate Constitution and the recent presidential election demonstrated the commitment of the Somali people, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the African Union and the United Nations to peace, democracy and national reconciliation.

Guinea also supported the current negotiations between the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan regarding post-independence issues, pursuant to the April 2011 African Union road map, endorsed by the Security Council. Concerning the Middle East, he said the restoration of lasting peace in the region required an independent Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel. The situation in Syria was more alarming than ever before, and Guinea urged stakeholders to exert all efforts to halt the violence, protect civilians and restore peace.

Turning to development, he said Rio+20 had provided the international community with the opportunity to renew its political commitment to sustainable development. Current priorities should include the effective implementation of the commitments undertaken, taking the legitimate concerns of all countries into account, especially those in Africa. Stressing that the continent remained the weakest link in the international development chain despite its enormous potential and economic performance of the last few years, he urged all partners to support its initiatives. Turning to developments in Guinea, he said the Government had undertaken a broad programme of democratization, as well as political, institutional, economic and social reform, and was hopeful that it would be able to hold legislative elections before the end of 2012. It had also called for the support of the Peacebuilding Commission in three priority areas: reconciliation and national unity; security reform; and youth and women's employment.

RAFAEL RONCAGLIOLO ORBEGOSO, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru, reaffirmed his full respect for the International Court of Justice, calling on States to refer cases to it and to comply with its rulings, in line with Chapter XIV of the Charter. Recourse to the Court was not an unfriendly act, but eloquent testimony of peaceful will. He condemned the use of force and violence in Syria and called upon all parties to the conflict immediately to cease hostilities and start a genuine dialogue in the framework of respect for the country's independence and sovereignty and the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens. Peru supported the efforts of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the Arab League in that regard.

Reaffirming his country's recognition of a Palestinian State, he said Peru had established diplomatic relations with it and supported its admission as a Member State of the United Nations. Condemning the unfair, illegal economic, financial and commercial blockade on Cuba, and expressing regret over the lack of a solution thus far to the dispute over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), he called upon Argentina and the United Kingdom to start a dialogue with the aim of resolving it. To overcome such challenges the United Nations needed reform, he said, stressing that the Security Council must become more efficient, transparent, democratic and representative, with a greater role for developing countries in peacemaking and security issues. Now was the time to institute that reform.

He said his country had deposited the instruments of ratification for the Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the amendments to the Montreal Protocol regarding ozone-depleting substances, and called upon all countries to follow suit. He said it was a moral imperative to ensure that perpetrators of grave crimes against humanity be properly tried and sanctioned. The rule of law demanded more inclusive societies, in which everyone had equal civil, political and social rights. Peru had incorporated the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 169 into its national legislation, the first country to do so, he said. As a result, indigenous peoples would be able fully to exercise their fundamental rights to the same degree as other citizens.

Given the magnitude of transnational organized crime, supported mainly by drug trafficking, greater efforts were needed to combat it, he said, recalling that last June, his country had organized the International Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Heads of Specialized National Agencies against the World Drug Problem in a bid to resume a political dialogue that had not taken place in almost 20 years. Peru would organize a global conference in November to exchange information and resources on combating that ill. Since last June, Peru had chaired the Presidency Pro Tempore of the Union of South American Nations, which aimed to turn the region, already a nuclear-weapon-free-zone, into a zone of peace and prosperity. He also welcomed the Colombian President's efforts to open a path of dialogue to end several years of violence in that country, and announced that in the coming days, Peru would host the Third Summit of South American and Arab Countries.

Right of Reply

The representative of Iran, speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he was replying to "a series of baseless allegations against my country" by the Prime Minister of the "notorious Israeli regime". Iran categorically rejected those allegations, in particular those relating to its nuclear programme, "which is exclusively peaceful and in full conformity with our international obligations and in exercising our inalienable right to use nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes".

As a country with no record of aggression in its centuries-long history, Iran was a party to all major international instruments banning the production and use of Weapons of Mass Destruction, he said, citing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and of Their Destruction (Chemical Weapons Convention) and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxic Weapons and on Their Destruction (Biological Weapons Convention). It was fully committed to all relevant legal obligations under those treaties, and was proud to have proposed a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

He said the Israeli regime had a record of ruthlessly killing innocent women and children, as well as committing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity over more than six decades. Its 33-day war against Lebanon, its barbaric 22-day attack on Gaza and its inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip were only some recent examples of such atrocities. "Not only is the Israeli regime the only non-party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East, but also, despite repeated calls by the international community, it has never declared its intention to do so," he noted. Including the United States and other main supporters of the Zionist regime, 189 States parties to the NPT had unanimously called upon that regime to accede to the Treaty without conditions, he said. Noting that officials of the Israeli regime had threatened Iran and other countries in the region with

military attack, he declared: “ Iran is strong enough to defend itself and reserves its full right to retaliate with full force against any attack.”

The representative of Japan, responding to the statement by China's Minister for Foreign Affairs, said his Prime Minister had stated that various issues of international society must be solved by reason rather than by force. Underscoring the importance of the rule of law, he said any attempt to realize an ideology or claim by the unilateral use of force or threat of force would be in violation of the spirit of the Charter.

The Senkaku Islands were clearly inherent to Japan, he said, recalling that in January 1895, a Cabinet-level decision had been made to incorporate them, while Formosa (Taiwan) and its associated islands had been ceded to Japan in line with the Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed in April that year. The assertion that Japan had taken the islands from China could not logically stand, he said, adding that his country had conducted surveys of the islands since 1899, and they had shown no trace of having been inhabited by China or under Chinese control.

He said Japan had renounced its territorial claim over Formosa, and China had ceded the Pescadores Islands after the Sino-Japanese war, in accordance with article 2(b) of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which made it clear that the Senkaku Islands were not included. Only since the 1970s had the Government of China and the Taiwanese authorities begun making territorial assertions about them.

The representative of China responded by saying that Japan had once again brazenly distorted history, resorting to fallacious arguments to justify its aggression towards China. The Chinese Prime Minister's position was consistent and clear: the Diaoyu Dao and affiliated islands had historically been an integral part of China, which had juridical evidence to support its claim. Japan had waged a war against China, stolen Taiwan and affiliated islands, and begun a colonial conflict over them during the Second World War. The Potsdam Declaration and Japanese instruments of surrender issued in 1945 confirmed that Japan, as the defeated country, must honour its international obligations in good faith, including by returning the Diaoyu Dao Islands it had stolen.

But Japan still clung to its colonial mindset, he said, adding that the so-called purchase of the islands was nothing more than money-laundering and was intended to confuse international public opinion. It was a serious encroachment on China's sovereignty, an open denial of its victory in the world anti-fascist war and a great challenge to the post-war international order. Any illegal action, no matter how it was packaged, was illegal in nature. Japan's actions fell into that category and were illegal and void. They would never change the fact that the Diaoyu Dao Islands were part of China's territory, nor would they ever shake China's resolve to claim its territorial integrity and sovereignty over them. He urged Japan immediately to halt all actions that undermined China's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Taking the floor again, the representative of Japan said there was no doubt that the Senkaku Islands were under his country's valid control. China's assertions had no value, and there was no issue of territorial integrity, he said, adding that Japan's position remained the same.

The representative of China firmly opposed that statement, saying Japan not only felt no guilt about colonialism, but made remarks that held no water at all. At the end of the nineteenth century, Japan had stolen from China large chunks of territory, including the Diaoyu Dao Islands. Today, it still held on to its obsolete territorial mentality, though the entire 1.3 billion population of China had expressed strong objections. China would continue to take resolute and forceful measures to safeguard its territorial integrity and sovereignty, he said, emphasizing that Japan must respect history, face reality, discard illusions, honour its international obligations, and stop all acts that undermined China's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

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