

Speech by President of the Republic of Finland Tarja Halonen at the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 21st September 2011

Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election. You have the full support of Finland for your leadership.

I also want to congratulate again you, Mr. Secretary-General, on your re-election for the second term, for which I wish you every success. You have ambitious priorities that Finland strongly supports.

I fully agree with you when you said, in connection with your re-election, that in an era of integration and interconnection, no country can solve all challenges on its own. Every country should be part of the solution. Common responses are needed more than ever. Hence, the importance of the United Nations has grown.

The UN - the 'G-193' - has been a success story. The guiding principles of the United Nations Charter - peace and security, human rights and development - have served well for decades. The Millennium Development Goals are more recent examples of the global reach of the UN. These goals have inspired governments to introduce measures that are saving lives every single day. The United Nations has also been at the forefront in supporting the empowerment of women. The UN Women gives women and girls even stronger and more unified voice.

Globalization has contributed to substantial economic growth. However, fruit of the growth have not been equally distributed between and within nations. This is wrong and this is not sustainable. It is our duty to provide sustainable future for our planet and its people. Sustainability, in brief, is about a resilient planet that supports the needs of all people worldwide.

We - the world community - have accomplished a lot since we adopted the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals eleven years ago. Both of them have proved to be effective tools in the reduction of extreme poverty.

The work must continue with enhanced determination. We must respect the interdependence of the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economical and ecological. If even one of these dimensions is missing, development cannot be sustainable.

Recent events in Northern Africa and the Middle East have once again emphasized that development, human rights and peace and security are interlinked. Everyone must be able to enjoy civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

I am pleased to chair the High-level Panel on Global Sustainability together with President Zuma of South Africa. We will deliver our recommendations towards the end of the year. The goal of the Panel is "to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality, make growth inclusive, and production and consumption more sustainable, while combating climate change and respecting the range of other planetary boundaries". We are fully convinced that the eradication of poverty and sustainable development are interlinked and can be reached together.

The Panel is building bridges between economy, ecology and social justice. Empowerment of women and youth is vital for our goal. It is necessary to put into use all human resources for the development of our societies.

We have not only discussed about setting the goals but also how to reach them. I believe that expanding the MDGs into Sustainable Development Goals around the year 2015 could help the world community to continue its fight against poverty and enhance sustainable development.

In today's world, there are far too many conflicts. As they often take place within countries, they are especially dangerous for civilians. These asymmetrical conflicts usually arise from injustice, violations of human rights and discrimination against minorities.

Mr. President, you have chosen a very important theme for the General Debate, namely mediation. Peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and mediation are at the very heart of the United Nations. Mediation has to be used at every stage of the conflict. We need to enhance the capabilities of the UN in this field. Training and guidance are pivotal. Also, women's participation as well as grass-roots activities and the work of NGOs are vital for our efforts.

On the initiative of Finland and Turkey, the General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution on mediation in June this year. This is the very first resolution on this theme in the history of the UN. The Resolution aims at strengthening the role of the United Nations in mediation. I would like to thank the Member States for the support to this process. Let us continue our common efforts also during the 66th General Assembly.

Peace processes need to be more inclusive. I would like to stress the importance of full and effective participation of women in all stages of peace processes. The record is far from impressive at the moment as the number of women around the negotiation tables continues to be strikingly low. I welcome the efforts by the UN Women to change the situation, and call upon us all to make a commitment to involve more women in this work.

Finland is a strong supporter of the UN, in word and deed. We contribute more than our share to peacekeeping, to development and to the promotion of human rights around the world. Finland wishes to continue to carry her responsibility - with your support - in the Security Council for the term 2013-2014. Our commitment, our capacity to serve on the Council, and our record speak for us.

Finland warmly welcomes the Republic of South Sudan as the 193rd Member State of the United Nations. The implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement has been a testimony to the importance of mediation and regional leadership. I commend the efforts of President Mbeki and his panel to find solutions to outstanding issues between Sudan and South Sudan.

The dramatic and rapidly evolving situation in the Arab world has been at the center of the attention of the international community. Women and men have marched together for a better future. It is important that they continue to participate side by side in building a democratic society. Democracy cannot be achieved without full participation of women.

As we welcome the new Libya into the world community, Finland commends the National Transitional Council for underlining the need to continue building a sense of national unity, reconciliation and an inclusive political system with respect for equal civil rights and freedom of expression.

Finland gives her full support to the transition reflecting the aspirations of Libyan people. We are ready to support the building of democratic society based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the fulfillment of the human rights of women.

The United Nations should play a central role in coordinating the international community's contribution. We very much welcome the UN Support Mission in Libya.

Reaching a solution to the Middle East conflict is more pressing than ever. The Palestinians have a right to their own state, Palestine. The international community gathered here in the UN General Assembly must show that it is united in its message to the parties. We need the urgent resumption of negotiations that will lead, within an agreed time-frame, to a two-state solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. There is no time to waste.

Mr. President, I have had an opportunity to lead Finland's delegation to the UN General Assembly since 1995. We have witnessed a remarkable widening of our common global agenda. Today's decisions will affect not only us but also the future generations. A change is necessary for the survival of the humankind. I am confident that the United Nations is the sole universal forum to respond to the challenges that the world is facing.