

New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations



Te Māngai o Aotearoa

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64th UN General Assembly

Statement to the Opening of the 64th General Assembly

Hon John Key

Prime Minister of New Zealand

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E nga mana
E nga reo
E nga hau e wha
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

To the powers
To the voices
To the four winds
I greet you all

Mr President; Distinguished representatives of the States of the United Nations; Mr Secretary General.

I have addressed this Assembly in te reo Māori, the indigenous language of New Zealand, and I bring warm Pacific greetings from all New Zealanders.

I am deeply honoured to lead New Zealand's delegation to this General Assembly for the first time.

Like every New Zealand Prime Minister since 1945, I stand here today to reaffirm my country's commitment to this United Nations and to the United Nations Charter.

The founding members of the United Nations gathered in San Francisco in 1945 to create this Organisation out of the ashes of the most destructive war and the most debilitating economic depression in modern history.

They believed in the 'larger freedom' of a world where collective action might avert common crises.

They believed in the Rule of Law, where all States would be held to a universal standard, and in a world where all peoples, faiths and cultures, could flourish.

They believed in a future where every human being would be 'free from want', and 'free from fear'.

And they wanted an international organisation and architecture that could deliver on those beliefs.

Distinguished representatives, New Zealand was active among those founding members in San Francisco.

And, as a small, independent, and diverse country in the Pacific, New Zealand still has a stake in this United Nations - this great meeting place of all States.

I have benefited personally from efforts to secure these ideals.

My family fled persecution in Europe, and I was privileged to grow up in a new world where a child of immigrants is now accorded the extraordinary privilege of leading his country and addressing this Assembly on its behalf.

Distinguished representatives, we meet at a time of many challenges.

With 130 Heads of State and Government assembled here this week, this General Assembly represents our greatest opportunity since the World Summit in 2005 to reaffirm our collective resolve.

New Zealand embraces this opportunity.

Today I will focus on some of the most pressing issues demanding our collective response.

Mr President, the crisis in the global economy continues.

We must remain resolute in our efforts to stabilize the global economy to enable a return to sustainable growth.

New Zealand welcomes the actions of the G20 over the past year. But in commending these efforts, we call on the G20 to heed the voice of the world's small economies and to ensure they are also heard in global decision-making.

Distinguished representatives, free and fair trade will be the principal engine for driving developing countries out of poverty and bringing greater prosperity to all.

An essential component in our response to the global economic crisis must therefore be a balanced and ambitious conclusion to the Doha Round of world trade talks.

A genuinely global agreement that reduces tariffs, eliminates export subsidies, reduces domestic subsidies and increases market access will see benefits flow to all States.

At a time when all countries are suffering from the brunt of the current economic crisis, further delay is inexcusable.

As one of the world's first truly open economies, New Zealand has an unwavering commitment to trade liberalization and to the pursuit of bilateral, regional and global free trade agreements.

We support the call of the UN Secretary-General for the immediate suspension of price controls and other agricultural trade restrictions to reduce soaring food prices and help millions cope with the highest food prices in thirty years.

And so, I call on all those States and groupings that have broken their undertakings and reintroduced protectionist measures to reconsider.

These actions are as harmful as they are unacceptable. Agriculture, which is so important for developing countries in particular, is one of the sectors most affected.

Distinguished representatives, the escalation of poverty is a result of the economic crisis.

New Zealand is naturally proud of the efforts of the UNDP to strengthen its focus as the UN's largest development agency on poverty and on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

For its part, New Zealand pledges to continue to increase its Official Development Assistance, with a clear focus on the Pacific Islands region.

Aid effectiveness is just as important as the quantum of aid; and that is why, last month, we committed to the Cairns Compact that will strengthen development coordination in the Pacific Islands.

Distinguished representatives, the major focus of the General Assembly this year must be the challenge of climate change.

Climate change demands innovation and a global response. The world cannot afford to contemplate failure at Copenhagen. Political leadership is needed, and it is on display.

At the Climate Change Summit this week the leaders of the world's three biggest economies showed their determination to both make Copenhagen a success and to take action themselves.

All countries must take action that reflects our individual circumstances, responsibilities and capabilities.

For our part, New Zealand is committed to securing a durable and meaningful agreement on climate change. An agreement that is both environmentally effective and economically efficient.

I have set a target for New Zealand of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by between 10 and 20% below 1990 levels by 2020, if there is a comprehensive global agreement. This is a per capita drop of 35 to 42 percent since 1990.

New Zealand is acutely conscious that most of our greenhouse gas emissions come from livestock methane emissions, which so far no technology can reduce.

At the same time we are proud of our role as a food producer to the world and the contribution we can make to assuring food-security for the world's people.

Our challenge is to find a way to balance growth in agricultural production with the need to reduce emissions and reach climate change targets.

This is not just a challenge for New Zealand, but one for the world.

Agricultural emissions make up 14% of all emissions worldwide. As demand for food rises, so will those emissions. Yet so far the only known way to achieve emission reductions from agriculture is through reductions in output.

That is not an acceptable response. Not for New Zealand. And not for a growing world that seeks freedom from hunger.

A better response to this challenge must be found. In my view that response must draw on the power and possibility of science.

Just as New Zealand is proud of its agricultural producers, so are we proud of our role in agricultural research. This research has resulted in scientific and technological advances that have improved production and fed millions.

But advancing research in the area of emission-reduction requires a commitment so broad that it is beyond the capacity of any one country.

This is a challenge that requires collective action and it is collective action I call for today.

New Zealand has developed a proposal for a Global Alliance on the reduction of agricultural emissions.

This Alliance would undertake international research and investment into new technologies and practices to help reduce agriculture-related emissions, and for greater co-ordination of existing efforts.

Through a Global Alliance we can find solutions faster, make better use of the money that is being spent around the world and encourage all countries and companies to do more.

We have been delighted with the interest received in our proposal so far and we will continue working with others to explore the concept.

Today, my call to other agricultural producers of the world is to rise to this challenge and join New Zealand in this research effort.

Distinguished representatives, I now want to address some of the security crises that we confront.

Yesterday I had the honour to observe the High-Level Security Council meeting on disarmament and non-proliferation.

As a country with a proud record of promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, I was heartened by the expressions of support for a world free of nuclear weapons.

We must take full advantage of this historic moment to advance the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. We owe it to our generation and to those who follow us to progress our vision for a world free from nuclear weapons.

As a proudly nuclear-free nation, and as a country that has been at the forefront of this debate since the 1970s, New Zealand stands ready to play its part.

We are optimistic about the prospects for progress.

Last week New Zealand presided over the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons through the implementation of safeguards under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is a fundamental pillar of the Agency's work.

Next year sees the five-yearly review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

New Zealand will actively work with our New Agenda Coalition partners for a meaningful outcome at that conference, to bring us closer to a truly secure world.

We will also continue to address the humanitarian harm of conventional weapons. We will work for a robust, action-oriented outcome later this year at the second Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention.

Looking back, I am proud of the role New Zealand was able to play in the negotiation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The government attaches priority to passing legislation to enable us to ratify this very significant treaty.

New Zealand also continues to play its part in maintaining and promoting international peace and security.

Peacekeeping remains one of this organisation's most essential tasks, and its most solemn responsibilities to its members.

While UN peacekeeping has been significantly strengthened since the testing it underwent in the 1990s, the demands now being placed on it are severe.

I want to express my profound gratitude to those civilians and military personnel who place their lives at risk to support peace and live up to the ideals of the United Nations Charter.

Ensuring UN peacekeeping is as effective and responsive as possible must therefore remain one of this organization's most urgent priorities.

The United Nations provides the legal mandate - and often the operational effectiveness - for our joint efforts to achieve and maintain peace and security.

New Zealand is firmly committed to supporting UN peacekeeping - both its own operations and others it has mandated such as those in which we are involved in Afghanistan, the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste.

All too often, the UN, has however, found itself unable to respond to emerging crises.

New Zealand therefore strongly supports the concept of Responsibility to Protect. I am pleased at the solid foundation the General Assembly's recent debate on R2P has laid for its implementation.

New Zealand also strongly supports the International Criminal Court. It is a fundamental tenet of our domestic legal systems that wrong doers must be brought to justice. The ICC is the mechanism for applying that same principle to persons accused of the most serious international crimes.

Distinguished representatives, New Zealand takes very seriously its responsibilities for creating and maintaining peace and security in its region and in the world. I am therefore pleased to confirm New Zealand's candidature for the United Nations Security Council for 2015 - 2016, in elections to be held in 2014.

In advancing its candidature, New Zealand does so as a state committed to upholding the international Rule of Law, and to providing a strong and principled Pacific voice on behalf of small States like ourselves with an interest in a fairer and more secure world.

We all have a stake in a world where peace and the Rule of Law prevail, where all States are secure and can prosper, and where all people are guaranteed the human rights and fundamental freedoms promised them in the Charter.

But we also know that solutions to the problems we collectively face do not lie with aspirational goals and promises that can be - and far too often are - quickly and quietly forgotten or ignored.

Hard, pragmatic decisions must be made.

Enforceable solutions must be implemented.

We know that effective, collective action is in every country's long-term, national interest.

That is what New Zealand believed in 1945; and I recommit now to taking action to live up to the ideals of the UN Charter, here, in this great chamber, this evening.