

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

THE SECRETARY GENERAL

REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

"Now Is Our Time"

New York, 23 September 2009

Mr. President,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President, let me express my heartfelt congratulations on your assumption of the presidency. I wish you every success and assure you of my full support.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We gather each and every September in a solemn rite. We come to reaffirm our founding Charter — our faith in fundamental principles of peace, justice, human rights and equal opportunity for all. We assess the state of the world, engage on the key issues of the day, lay out our vision for the way ahead.

This year this opening of the General Debate of the 64th session of the General Assembly asks us to rise to an exceptional moment. Amid many crises -- food, energy, recession and pandemic flu, hitting all at once -- the world looks to us for answers.

If ever there were a time to act in a spirit of renewed multilateralism -- a moment to create a United Nations of genuine collective action -- it is now.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Now is our time. A time to put the "united" back into the United Nations. United in purpose. United in action.

First — let us make this a year that we, united nations, rise to the greatest challenge we face as a human family: the threat of catastrophic climate change. Yesterday, 100 heads of state and government set out the next steps toward Copenhagen. They recognized the need for an agreement all nations can embrace, in line with their capabilities -- consistent with what science requires -- grounded in "green jobs" and "green growth," the lifeline of the 21st century. Our road to Copenhagen requires us to bridge our differences. I firmly believe we can.

Second — let this be the year that nations united to free our world of nuclear weapons. For too long, this great cause has lain dormant. That is why, last October, I proposed a 5-point plan for putting disarmament back on the global agenda. And now, the international climate is changing. The Russian Federation and the United States have pledged to cut their nuclear arsenals. This coming May, at the UN Review Conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we have an opportunity to push for real progress.

Tomorrow's historic Security Council summit — chaired by the President of the United States, with us for the first time — offers a fresh start. With action now, we can get the ratifications to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty into force. Together, let us make this the year we agreed to banish the bomb.

Third — in our fight against world poverty, let this be the year we focus on those left behind. Some speak of “green shoots of recovery,” but we see red flags of warning. Our recent report, “Voices of the Vulnerable,” highlights a new crisis. The near-poor are becoming the new poor. An estimated 100 million people could fall below the poverty line this year. Markets may be bouncing back, but incomes and jobs are not.

People are angry. They believe the global economy is stacked against them. That is why we have put forward a Global Jobs Pact for balanced and sustainable growth. That is why we are creating a new Global Impact Vulnerability Alert System, giving us real-time data and analysis on the socio-economic picture around the world. We need to know who is being hurt, and where, so we can best respond.

That is also why, next year at this time, we will convene a special summit on the Millennium Development Goals. With only five years to go, we must mount a final push toward 2015. Rightly, we put women and children at the fore. UNICEF reports a 28 percent decline in child mortality over the past two decades. We can hope for similar progress on maternal health and mortality.

The prevention of sexual violence against women must be a top priority. Let us agree: these acts are an abomination. Leaders of every nation are personally accountable when such crimes are committed within their borders. When women die in childbirth, when they are raped as a weapon of war and have nowhere to turn, we of the UN cannot look the other way. And that is why, just recently, you agreed to create a single agency to address women's issues. We have never been more empowered to empower women.

Excellencies,

This Assembly also reaffirmed the responsibility to protect. In our modern era, no nation, large or small, can violate the human rights of its citizens with impunity. Where conflicts arise, justice and accountability should follow.

That is why the work of the International Criminal Court is so vital. We look to the review conference in Kampala, next May, as an opportunity to strengthen its mandate.

We can achieve none of our noble goals without peace, security and justice. In Darfur, that means consolidating recent progress and delivering on our mandate. We will be 90 percent deployed by year's end. Yet we still lack critical assets, particularly transport and helicopters. Meanwhile, we must continue to work, urgently, for the broader stability of Sudan and the region and shore up the comprehensive peace with South Sudan.

Somalia continues to demand attention whether to support African peacekeepers and the government or international anti-piracy efforts.

We will continue to press for resettlement, reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. We welcome the government's commitment to allow all displaced persons to return to their homes by the end of January — as reaffirmed last week to my envoy.

We will work hard for freedom and democracy in Myanmar. The release of some political prisoners last week falls short of what is needed. We call on Myanmar's friends and neighbors to do more, much more, in the best interests of Myanmar and its people. If next year's elections are to be accepted as credible and inclusive, all political prisoners must be released -- including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

We worked to stop the bloodshed in Gaza. Yet people continue to suffer. Issues of justice and accountability need to be addressed. We must revive negotiations toward a two-state solution and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

In Afghanistan, we face a difficult environment. Recent elections revealed serious defects. Yet we should not forget the progress made -- progress we can build on. We are committed to seeing the Afghans through their long night. We will stay with them. We pledge to stand, as well, with the people of Pakistan.

We have made significant progress in Timor Leste, Haiti, Sierra Leone and Nepal. We see quiet progress in Iraq -- and fresh opportunities in Cyprus. Now is the time to take stock and move forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me close by inviting you to look around you. By the end of this General Assembly, our Secretariat building will be empty. Our staff will have dispersed across the city. Our United Nations will be completely renovated. Our common ambition is to make this outward renovation the symbol of our inward renewal.

That is why we have placed such emphasis on building a stronger UN for a better world. We have made progress in Delivering as One UN. We have made strides in getting "peace-building" right, so that societies emerging from war do not slide back into conflict. We have sharpened our tools of mediation and diplomacy so that we can stop crises from escalating into broader and more costly tragedies. We created the Department of Field Support, and we are developing the "New Horizons" strategy to make peacekeeping more agile and effective.

In this, we need the strong support of Member States, just as we do to secure the safety of our brave staff serving in dangerous places. A record number -- 132 -- lost their lives last year in the causes we all serve.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

This year, I have traveled from the ice rim of the Arctic to the steppes of Mongolia. I have seen, first-hand, the effects of climate change on our planet and its people.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, I met an 18-year-old girl raped by soldiers. Her hope for a new life is the United Nations.

At summits from Trinidad and Tobago, London to L'Aquila, I have spoken out on one point above all others.

We of the UN are the voice of the voiceless, the defenders of the defenseless.

If we are to offer genuine hope to the hopeless if we are to truly turn the corner to economic recovery, then we must do so for all nations and all people. So much is possible if we act together. Together, we are here to take risks, to assume the burden of responsibility, to rise to an exceptional moment, to make history. This year, of all years, asks no less.

Because we are the United Nations. We are the best hope for humankind. And now is our time.

Thank you.