



BELGIUM

Statement
by
H.E. Mr. Steven Vanackere
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for
Foreign Affairs and Institutional Reforms
of the Kingdom of Belgium

66th General Assembly
of the Organisation of the United Nations

New York, 24 September 2011

Check against delivery

Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations
One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, 41st Floor, 885 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017
Tel. 1(212) 378-6300, Fax 1 (212) 681-7618
E-mail: newyorkun@diplobel.fed.be website <http://www.diplomatie.be/newyorkun>

Monsieur le Président,
Monsieur le Secrétaire-Général,
Honorables Membres de l'Assemblée Générale,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

Last year, I stood here and insisted upon the importance of the principle of accountability. This year, there is even more reason to underscore this core value in national and international politics.

In several countries of the Arab world, in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere, people are transforming the outlook of their societies, moving towards more accountable leadership.

On the African continent, in Côte d'Ivoire, a leader who repeatedly plunged his country into violence did not stand the test of democratic legitimacy. With parliamentary elections scheduled to take place later this year, Côte d'Ivoire is now ready to make a fresh start.

And in Europe, the arrest of Ratko Mladic confirms what leaders should know all too well: that war crimes will not remain unpunished forever, that this world will not accept impunity.

The past year has shown that more than ever, History is on the side of those who, worldwide, strive for more accountability. They will also find Belgium on their side.

Accountability means first of all **legal accountability**: the obligation to implement international treaties and to respect international law. A former Nuremberg prosecutor, Benjamin Ferencz, stated that 'there can be no peace without justice, no justice without law and no meaningful law without a Court to decide what is just and lawful under any given circumstance'.

Some of the examples I just mentioned illustrate this all too well. Ratko Mladic is on trial in The Hague. Mass atrocities committed in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya have been referred to the International Criminal Court.

From this place, I would like to launch a strong appeal to those Member States which have not yet done so, to join and shoulder the Rome Statute, as a contribution to a sustainable and accountable international legal system.

But accountability is of course much broader. It also implies **political accountability**. Governments, politicians, civil servants are accountable and responsible to their citizens, be it through the ballot box or through constructive engagement with representative organizations.

Let me be frank: this is also a challenge in the continent where I come from, Europe. We, as European leaders, shouldn't run away from the obligation of being accountable to the people we represent. And in the Durban spirit of non-discrimination, let me add: **all** the people, regardless of their ethnic background, their religion or belief, their gender, sexual orientation or social position.

Worldwide, the challenges are sometimes of a different order. But let us be clear:

Leaders who believe that they can cling to power through terror and suppression make a cruel mistake.

Leaders who believe that pointing guns at their own people, that sending death squads on the streets, that stoning women to death is acceptable, lost touch with mankind and are bound to lose all support from their own people and from the world.

Warlords who think they can get away with sexual abuse of women or recruiting child soldiers, should be stopped and held accountable by a united and firm international community.

Belgium will not stand idly by when people claim a future free of coercion and terror. Instead of non-interference, Belgium believes in non-indifference. Sovereignty is no longer a wall leaders can use to violate the rights of their citizens. Sovereignty cannot be used as an excuse to run away from the responsibility to protect their people.

That is one of the main lessons which I draw from recent events in the Arab world: that democracy and accountability are of a universal nature. That they cannot be claimed and should not be claimed by any nation or group of nations.

Voyez la **Libye**, où le Conseil de Sécurité a pu empêcher un massacre à Benghazi. La Belgique a décidé, avec le soutien quasi-unanime du parlement belge, de participer à l'opération militaire 'Unified Protector', en en assumant le risque et le coût.

Car elle est convaincue que la communauté internationale a la responsabilité de passer à l'action lorsque des populations sont exposées à une menace imminente. Molière le disait, nous ne sommes pas responsables que de ce que nous faisons, mais aussi de ce que nous ne faisons pas.

Maintenant, lorsque la menace immédiate s'estompe, cette même communauté internationale a la responsabilité d'assister lors de la reconstruction de la Libye, une responsabilité qui fait partie intégrante, ne l'oublions pas, de la responsabilité de protéger. La Belgique y contribuera.

Voyez le reste du continent africain, où la population désire que sa voix soit entendue par le biais d'élections libres et justes.

Dans ce contexte, je voudrais mentionner explicitement la **République Démocratique du Congo**, où après des années de violence des progrès indéniables ont été réalisés.

Le rôle important des Nations Unies, et de la MONUSCO en particulier, ne peut pas être ignoré. Il demeure encore des défis importants à relever: la continuation et le renforcement des efforts de stabilisation à l'Est du Congo, la réforme du secteur de sécurité, l'établissement de l'état de droit, la lutte contre l'impunité et les violences sexuelles,...

Ce sont des ingrédients essentiels de la consolidation de la démocratie. Les élections de 2006 ont mis la RDC sur la route vers la démocratie. Les élections de fin novembre devront confirmer que la RDC est à même, une fois pour toutes, d'abandonner un passé sanglant.

En tant que partenaire important de la RDC, mon gouvernement contribue financièrement aux préparations électorales et insiste pour que tous les candidats et tous les citoyens puissent participer à ces élections de manière pacifique et dans le plein respect des règles démocratiques.

Let us finally look at the **Middle East**, a conflict region which this week received much attention here in this Hall. Dag Hammarskjold, to whom this week is dedicated and who himself dedicated much of his efforts to finding a lasting peace in that region, said more than half a century ago: 'the building of a firm bridge over which you can pass without any difficulties may be a long story'.

Fifty years later, we still don't have such a 'firm bridge'. This is not acceptable. The parameters of a sustainable solution are well-known. Both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples have legitimate aspirations. People want statehood, people want to live in peace and security. These were the messages which President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu brought us yesterday, and it must be possible to satisfy both legitimate needs.

Over the last few months, the EU and its High Representative have spared no efforts to get a process of negotiations started. There is no alternative to negotiations, however difficult and risky this path might be. It is therefore my sincere hope that the steps proposed by the Quartet yesterday will be fully implemented.

It is also clear that the Palestinian Authority has successfully progressed on the road to statehood, also thanks to the important and sustained contributions by the EU and by Belgium, and that it has now reached a level of statehood that the world cannot ignore.

Now is the time to show leadership. After all, that is what accountability towards the people of the region is all about.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

Many have said it before: the global challenges we face are multiple: from terrorism to climate change and sustainable development – and in that regard the upcoming Rio +20 Summit will ask a lot of our energy and creativity in the months ahead.

From financial turmoil to terrible humanitarian tragedies like the one in the Horn of Africa.

From banning cluster munitions to curbing nuclear proliferation, notably in North Korea and Iran.

From guaranteeing the responsible and transparent exploitation of natural resources through schemes such as the Kimberley Process, to fully implementing the indicators of the landmark Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

For Belgium, the only way to address these challenges is through a multilateral approach.

No country, as big or important as it might be, is capable of tackling global challenges alone. No country, how modest-sized it might be, should think that it cannot be part of the solution.

Multilateralism is not about blocking solutions. It should lead to change, and should have the United Nations at its centre. The United Nations, which indeed has proven its added value in so many fields.

Let me just mention one such field to which Belgium attaches a particular importance: international conflict mediation.

When the Secretary-General addressed this body earlier this week, he mentioned Guinea, Kenya and Kyrgyzstan as UN mediation successes. The list is undoubtedly longer.

But so are the needs. I am therefore grateful to the President of the General Assembly for having chosen 'mediation' as a central theme for our discussion. I strongly believe that the UN should continue to invest in strengthening its mediation capacities.

I am proud to announce that Belgium has decided to financially support the UN Mediation Unit and to actively engage with the President and with other governments and non-governmental stakeholders to strengthen the role of UN mediation efforts.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

Some say that the UN is losing its power as a global platform for discussion and decision-making. Some say that global trends point towards a more fragmented structure of global governance. I don't think this is true. It would certainly not be desirable.

Belgium remains a staunch supporter of the United Nations. Our current engagement in the Peacebuilding Commission and our bid for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for the period 2019-2020 show our willingness to play our role in the UN.

Today, I am also proud to introduce Belgium's candidacy to the Human Rights Council for the period 2015-2018. To add our voice to those who fight impunity and discrimination. To give a voice to the men, to the women, to the children who worldwide see their rights curtailed. To turn the principle of non-indifference into a living reality.

Not for the sake of ourselves. But for the sake of those to whom we are accountable.

I thank you.