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ADDRESS

BY

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TO THE

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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, I wish to congratulate my dear friend His Excellency Vuk Jeremic for his election as the President of the 67th General Assembly.

I believe with his able leadership he will contribute greatly to work of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

I want to be frank and speak the language of the peoples we all represent.

Every year, we all gather here at the United Nations, the embodiment of the human quest for peace, security and international order.

We exchange views on the daunting challenges that we all face and express our strong commitment to resolve them.

On many matters, we speak as one, yet we often fail to act in unity.

We express our commitment to the settlement of the frozen conflicts.

We have time and again declared our support for a two-state solution to the Palestine, and accepted numerous resolutions to this end.

However, we still hope, one day, Palestine will be represented as an equal member in this Assembly.

For instance, we underline the need for a solution to Nagorno-Karabakh in accordance with the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, yet there has been no single step towards resolution of this problem for the last two decade.

Yet again, the Cyprus problem has remained unresolved for almost half a century. Nearly a decade has passed since the UN Settlement Plan of 2004, which was endorsed by the entire international community.

However, the Turkish Cypriots continue to face isolation, unlawful and unjust embargo as if it was a token of appreciation for their support for UN-led settlement.

My point speaks for itself: While we cannot resolve current problems, each year we find ourselves besieged by ever mounting new ones.

Terrorists continue to strike and take lives of innocent people. Yet, we still have no effective international response and adequate solidarity against the scourge of terrorism.

Today, some states employ methods of state violence and brutal oppression with impunity that cost lives of the innocent citizens that they are obliged to protect.

We firmly believe that human life is sacred. And life is the foremost blessing for any human being whoever and wherever they are.

However, millions of people live in poverty and under oppression. They are deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms, suffering extreme conditions that no human being should ever live through.

To soothe our collective conscience, we constantly reiterate pledges to help alleviate the misery of these people.

However we fall short of matching our words with deeds.

We live in perpetual hope. After all, as human beings, we are the children of hope.

For us, every dawn, every sunrise, and every spring signifies a beginning of hope.

We yearn for peace, and idealize peace. It is the essence of our nature.

Humanity expects from us, the leaders of nations, to move mankind toward real peace.

However, we lag far behind in meeting the expectations of our nations.

If it is not for us to provide relief and give hope to a child living in a refugee camp or in open prisons in certain parts of the world, then what is the prospect that we will cultivate real peace?

When a child opens his eyes to a world of extreme poverty and oppression in a refugee camp or in the streets of her neighborhood; when a parent leaves behind a destroyed house, orphans and widows, how can we prevent them not to succumb to despair and pessimism?

If we cannot regard the rights of a person in Syria, Palestine, Somalia, Afghanistan and Rakhine region and other places, as equal as of our own, how can we talk about freedom and justice?

If fundamental human rights are forfeited for the sake of power politics, and become negotiable and even alienable in talks among a few nations in the UN Security Council, how are we to achieve universal human rights and security?

If we remain incapable to take actions to preserve the universal principles that the forefathers of the United Nations set out when forming this body, how can we demonstrate to the people that the flag of the UN represents hope and a safeguard for their destiny?

If the use of force is accepted as an unlimited means;

If indiscriminate attacks and collective punishment becomes weapons in the hands of cruel regimes against their own citizens, as we are witnessing every day—day and night—in Syria;

If we fail to hear and rise up to the cry of innocent masses wherever they are;

And if we cannot force these brutal regimes to submit to justice and the rule of law, how are we to maintain international peace and security?

The peaceful world, as the founders of the United Nations envisioned, cannot be established if we remain ineffective in our work against these challenges.

Let us not forget:

Our inability to act becomes the tool in the hands of despots and destructive regimes to demolish their cities, towns and villages, massacre their own citizens, and make a mockery of the civilized world and the United Nations.

Our failure to address a humanitarian crisis shakes our collective conscience.

Worse, however, our inaction eventually emboldens oppressors and aggressive regimes, creates evil alliances to perpetuate and commit crimes against humanity.

And let us make no mistake:

Mercy shown to an oppressor is the most merciless act toward people under oppression.

And if not now, when are we supposed to act in unity?

And if it is not the United Nations, who is to lead?

If it is not us, then who will shoulder the responsibility to protect the innocent civilians?

And let us now imagine that we are in the shoes of those people, how can we even dream about a real future?

Distinguished delegates,

We need a strong, efficient and credible UN. To this end, we must first tackle the long outstanding issue of the UN reform to make it fit for purpose.

The working methods and structures of the UN are not commensurate with the current realities of the world.

The UN Security Council, with its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, should become more representative and functional.

It has to respond to the real needs of the world.

That is the only way that it will remain relevant in the enormous challenges that we all face.

I can freely appeal to your conscience, as Turkey has solid record, be it Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Bosnia or cooperation with the LDCs, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative and the Mediation for Peace among many.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me now to briefly touch upon some specific issues, which continue to pose formidable challenges for the international community.

Let me start and underline that the recent attacks against the Prophet Mohammad - peace be upon him- and Islam are outright provocations.

They aim to pit nations and peoples against each other.

We deplore in the strongest terms the malicious attempts to denigrate the most sacred values of Islam and any faith.

We condemn all sorts of incitement to hatred and religious discrimination against Moslems and people of other faiths.

Unfortunately, Islamophobia has also become a new form of racism like anti-Semitism.

It can no longer be tolerated under the guise of freedom of expression.

Freedom does not mean anarchy. It means responsibility.

The purpose of the Islamophobia is clear and simple:

It aims to create an abstract, and an imaginary enemy from the millions of peace loving Moslems all over the world.

Regretfully, accepting generalities, stereotypes and prejudice as truth, many people unknowingly become Islamophobic.

However, no agenda, no provocation, no attack, no incitement of hatred can darken the bright face of Islam.

At the same time, we condemn all sorts of provocations and violence that led to the loss of lives in many countries, including the US Ambassador in Libya.

I express our sincere condolences for all who have lost their lives.

Violence against innocent people cannot be justified under any pretext.

Any such activity, no matter by whom it is carried out or for what purpose, is a betrayal against the soul, spirit and letter of Islam.

However, the recent events are testament to a more serious problem that should concern not just Moslems, but the adherents of all faiths and religions.

The alarming increase in the number of acts that defame religions and thereby people who adhere to such religions, have now serious implications for international peace and security.

Therefore, time has come to establish denigration of all religions and their followers as a hate crime.

We have to take swift measures.

We cannot and we shall not leave our future vulnerable to the reckless provocations of all sorts of extremists.

We need to craft a universal policy and legal instrument that while protecting free expression, should also ensure respect for religion and prevent the intentional insults against everyone's faith.

The solution should not be arbitrary.

It has to focus on those who defame a faith with the intention of inciting discrimination, hostility or violence.

We have to find a balance between protecting the rights of an individual or group to free expression and protecting the right of another individual or group to not to become the target of hatred, emotional, incited or psychological violence.

So from this stage, I would like to make a strong appeal to the members of the international community to set up all necessary instruments in combating all acts of hate crime, including the denigration of religions and defamation of their followers.

The United Nations, in particular, must lead this effort and should provide the international legal framework to this end.

We are resolved to actively pursue this objective and work diligently with the like-minded nations and international organizations to ensure that we take a united and effective stance against Islamophobia and all forms of hate crimes.

On the other hand, we are well aware of the need to ensure the safety, security and protection of the diplomats. In the last four decade, Turkish nation lost its 33 diplomats because of the ASALA terrorism.

We encourage the UN to focus on a new understanding for protection of the diplomats.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

As a mockery of the values we all share, the people of Syria continue to suffer under the brutality and the tyranny of the regime in Damascus for the last 18 months.

The numbers speak in volume.

More than 30 thousand people were killed so far, around ³⁰⁰500 hundred thousand Syrian fled to neighboring countries, and about ¹3 million people are internally displaced.

Unfortunately, this humanitarian tragedy has become just a statistic for many.

And what has the international community done to stop this carnage?

Literally nothing...

We are yet to see a single effective action to save innocent lives.

It is such a disgrace to witness that today, after 20 years, the ghosts of Serebrenica and Halapcha still continue to haunt us, this time in the cities of Syria.

One can argue about the reasons for the failure of the Security Council to stop violence of the Syrian regime.

However, there can be no legitimate explanation for the failure of the Security Council to reflect the collective conscience of the international community.

It has to uphold its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security.

It is the inability of the Security Council to act that still encourages the Syrian regime to kill ever more people.

If the Security Council does not follow the conscience of the international community that was reflected by the resolutions adopted with more than two thirds of vote in this General Assembly, who will respond to the cries of the Syrian people?

For how long we, the international community, will allow this humanitarian tragedy to continue?

The responsibility to protect the people of Syria is our fundamental duty.

No political differences, no balance of power politics, no geopolitical considerations should prevail over our conscience and our concern for the destiny of the Syrian people.

More importantly, the situation in Syria has evolved into a real threat to regional peace and security.

The Syrian regime deploys every instrument to turn the legitimate struggle of the Syrian people into a sectarian war, which will engulf the entire region into flames.

And unfortunately, the longer this regime is allowed to wage its campaign of violence, the harder it will be to prevent such a dreadful eventuality.

It is high time that the UN Security Council must take action as this Assembly called for.

There has to be a solution to ensure the immediate safety and security of the Syrian people.

There has to be a solution for a sound transition process that will pave the way for the creation of a new and democratic Syria.

The regime in power has to step down and allow an interim Government to lead the country to free and fair elections.

The Syrian people need our united support and solidarity in their struggle for their future and for having the right to a legitimate and representative government.

The Turkish nation stood by their brethren, the Syrian people, in their legitimate struggle.

We now care for 90 thousand displaced Syrians.

And let me underline once again:

Since the beginning of the conflict we never have and we will never hesitate to be with our Syrian brothers and sisters at their most difficult hour.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

Another tragedy that has long been taking place before our eyes in the Middle East is Palestine.

This is the fourth General Assembly where we keep on stressing the unacceptability and unsustainability of the situation in Gaza. However, to date, there has been no progress.

As a result, in the fourth year of the unlawful blockade by Israel, the people and particularly the children in Gaza continue to live in despair, desolation and fear.

There have been many decisions and resolutions adopted in the UN calling for the lifting of this blockade.

But as of today Israel persists in its illegal policy and thus causes misery and anguish in Gaza.

In fact, we see the same attitude by Israel over the entire occupied Palestinian territories.

Despite insistent calls by the international community, it carries on with its illegal settlements on Palestinian land and thus deliberately undermines the prospects of a peaceful two-state solution.

Indeed, when President Mahmoud Abbas spoke at this Assembly last year and declared the right of Palestine to be recognized as an independent state, I remember seeing the whole Assembly in standing ovation.

But today, we are yet to see the State of Palestine as an equal member of this Assembly.

How can we convince the Palestinian people that the international community is serious about a two-state solution while no UN resolution helped their just cause for an independent state of Palestine.

Turkey will certainly support the Palestinian people in their quest for statehood, dignity and peace.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Guests,

While the whole world's attention is rightly focused on the Middle East, we should not forget that there are serious human tragedies taking place elsewhere too.

And we do not have the luxury to turn a blind eye to any human suffering.

As I have personally witnessed during my visit in June, the people of Rakhine region and especially the Rohingya Moslems are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

The democratization process underway in Myanmar provides us with a window of opportunity as the government repeatedly stressed its readiness to cooperate with the international community for easing the suffering of these people.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

Before concluding my remarks, I wish to touch upon yet another long-standing conflict, which also requires immediate practical steps towards a fair and lasting solution.

I am referring to the Cyprus problem.

Unfortunately, the new round of talks started in 2008, are stuck with no end in sight, due to Greek Cypriots' intransigence and lack of political will.

And today, despite half a century's experience and body of UN work, there is still not a clear perspective for solution.

The Turkish Cypriots have so far proven their firm commitment to a negotiated solution, but yet remain subject to inhumane and unlawful embargo.

This is simply unfair.

They should not be forced to play this game for an indefinite period without a clear perspective and timeline for a solution.

The international community must not remain indifferent to what is happening in Cyprus either.

After all, the continuation of the problem creates additional risks for the stability of the region.

Moreover, the unilateral exploration of oil and natural gas by the Greek Cypriots around the island further intensifies the risks.

Under these circumstances, the UN must do more than what it currently does. The Security Council in particular has to facilitate a solution rather than merely sustaining the status quo.

A change of mentality is essential. There should be a distinction between those that seek and aspire for a solution and those who reject it.

It is no longer enough to play lip service to a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. It is time to act before it is too late.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

In concluding, I wish to go back to what I said at the beginning of my remarks.

We are at the end of the opening session of yet another UN General Assembly.

We all expressed our desire and commitment for a more peaceful and prosperous world.

However, ensuring positive change can only be realized if our actions match our words and promises.

Every attempt to achieve our objective for real peace,

Every moment we spend to uphold the right and justice,

Every effort we make for freedoms and human rights, however small, will provide the biggest comfort for those who struggle to have a say on their destiny.

A while ago, I asked if not now, when...

This year let us make a difference and let us hope that we will not repeat the same question next September.

Thank you.