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Statement

by

**H.E. Mr. Zoran Milanović
Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia**

**at the general debate of the 67th session of the
General Assembly**

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Mr. President,

I am pleased to address this Assembly for the first time since assuming office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia. Let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to this important position. I also thank your predecessor, H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar, for his leadership during the presidency of the General Assembly in the past twelve months.

Mr. President,

We live in times of rapid changes, some of them positive, others deeply troubling. The world is becoming more interconnected, which strengthens economic opportunities and accelerates development. Advances in science and technology are bringing measurable progress for humankind. Profound transformations in North Africa have raised hopes of people for real democracy and freedom. But there is also much which is disturbing. Conflicts in many parts of the world are wreaking havoc on innocent civilians. Our planet is experiencing growing environmental damage. Global financial and economic crisis still negatively affects the majority of countries, both in developing and developed world. International peace and security is under strain by terrorism and extremism, poverty and inequality, human rights abuses and persecution.

Mr. President,

In confronting these challenges, Croatia acts in the global arena on the basis of two fundamental tenets. We stand ready to assume responsibility towards our own citizens and our neighbors in the region; responsibility to be a constructive actor in Europe and a reliable partner to all peace-loving countries in the world. And we actively promote solidarity with vulnerable groups and communities, with the poor and the needy, with the defenseless and the underprivileged. Responsibility and solidarity – these two principles are central to our engagement in the United Nations in the pursuit of peace and security, in advancing freedom and democracy, protecting human rights, enhancing sustainable development, respecting the international law, ensuring equality and social justice and promoting the rule of law.

Mr. President,

This year Croatia marks the 20th anniversary of its membership in our global Organization. We are grateful to the UN for playing an important role in our country's struggle for political independence, international recognition and full territorial integrity. We harbor great expectations from the United Nations. As a beacon of multilateralism, it provides the only universal framework for finding common solutions to international crises and current challenges. But we have to ask ourselves: Has the UN done enough? And what can we do collectively to improve its performance?

On the one hand, we support the UN reform process with the aim to enhance its accountability, efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. United we are stronger than alone. But let me stress one thing. If each one of our countries becomes more democratic, more developed, better run, more stable and more responsible, our combined strength will rise exponentially.

Mr. President,

The topic of the general debate – resolving international disputes by peaceful means – is at the very heart of the United Nations. The UN was built for this, to prevent war and keep peace. We highly value instruments of preventive diplomacy, mediation and other peaceful means of resolving disputes. In particular, we see merit in resorting to the International Court of Justice, Permanent Court of Arbitration and other existing institutions. We have done it ourselves. We agreed to settle the border issue with our neighbor Slovenia through arbitration. However, we must understand that, in the long run, peace cannot be imposed on parties to a dispute. Each situation has its own pace and dynamics. But there should be no excuse for the lack of genuine effort. Moreover, without thorough resolution of issues, there can be no room for a true reconciliation process to take place. In this vein, it is reassuring to note that support for peaceful resolution is coming from many quarters of the world, especially from those countries which in the recent past have opted for using military means to settle disputes with their immediate neighbors.

However, not everyone shares the identical respect for peace and international law. This year has been particularly unfortunate in terms of the efficiency of the UN in the area of conflict prevention, mediation and protection of civilians. We have witnessed appalling events and thousands of civilian victims exposed to heavy arms and brutality by the armed forces and paramilitary groups. The lack of univocal action against the most severe violations of the UN Charter is deeply troubling. We must resolutely counter this obsession with violence and repression. We should not shy away from our responsibilities. At this juncture, I have to strongly condemn the recent killing of United States Ambassador to Libya. People come from different cultures, legal traditions, historical backgrounds and forms of government. But violence can never be an acceptable response to the freedom of speech.

Mr. President,

Like so many previous speakers, I stress the importance of keeping high international attention on Syria. We align with the EU position on the situation in Syria. We see the need for prompt action on two fronts. The immediate priority is to stop the loss of life on both sides in the conflict, to provide humanitarian aid and assistance to the Syrian people and to support plans for economic and political stabilization of the country. More fighting and militarization will only exacerbate the suffering and make a peaceful resolution of the crisis more difficult. In addition, we have to remain committed to pursuing a Syrian-led political transition that would meet the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people. Resolving this crisis is our common responsibility. Therefore, we relentlessly call for the full respect of international law, especially international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law.

There is no peace without justice, and there is no justice without the rule of law and without the fight against impunity. We support concepts of human security and responsibility to protect, their implementation as well as their improvement through an open and constructive dialogue within the UN framework. We also support the work of the International Criminal Court. Undoubtedly, there are sufficient conflict prevention tools at our disposal. The question remains whether we can muster enough resolve to use them.

Mr. President,

Syria is this most recent and most striking example which proves that there is a need for a greater role for preventive diplomacy and mediation in the early phase of a conflict. The later we engage, the more divided we are. Timely prevention is crucial for a successful conflict resolution. Prevention is also indispensable for countering other threats that destabilize countries and societies. Let me give you one example. If a country is forced to fight corruption through its law-enforcement and judiciary, it is usually a sign that it is too late, that corruption has left its corrosive imprint on society. Our goal is to invest efforts in building a society in which corruption is an endemic phenomenon. A society in which elected officials in government structures demonstrate responsibility towards public office, which in turn encourages citizens to embrace a corruption-free culture in their daily behavior. When leaders lead by positive example, people tend to follow. This is because culture flows from structure. This is also the reason why, at the UN level, we provide our full support to the implementation, wider acceptance and universalization of international legal instruments on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, countering terrorism and preventing corruption. In this context, we are disappointed that recent Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty was not able to conclude its work in agreement. Achieving concrete developments towards possible adoption of a Treaty remains an obligation for the entire UN membership.

Mr. President,

Global economic crisis combined with the effects of globalization has contributed to the rise of popular distrust in the capability of political leaders to deliver needed solutions. This calls for greater responsibility, better governance and stronger cooperation among states, civil society and the private sector. The Croatian Government has made notable progress in making its work more transparent and more available to its citizens. As a member of the Open Government Partnership initiative, we have become active in the fields of fiscal transparency, access to information, information technology, and civil society participation. We are pleased to host the Second European Outreach and Support Meeting of the Initiative on 4 and 5 October 2012 in Dubrovnik where we expect the sharing of best practices and further promotion of cooperation between governments and civil society organizations.

Mr. President,

Croatia has undergone an extensive but successful political, economic and social transition in a fairly short period of time. For this reason, we have a special understanding and a first-hand experience of the interwoven nature of peace, security, development and the promotion and protection of human rights. Today we are sharing our knowledge and experiences with countries in the region of South- Eastern Europe as well as with countries emerging from crises, where our post-conflict understanding in nation and institution building is particularly relevant. Croatia is currently a Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission. My country stands ready to assume its responsibility for creating more relevant, better performing and more empowered peacebuilding structures. The primary goal of international peacebuilding effort is to guarantee that fragile societies do not slide back into conflict. To achieve that, Croatia advocates that national ownership and determined building of national capacities should underpin any peacebuilding activity. In addition, we need improved overall coordination, thorough and inclusive planning and timely and sustainable funding. Croatia has already joined the CAPMATCH initiative, designed

to address the state-building needs of fragile and conflict-affected countries, by offering our help in various fields of expertise gained through our own political transition, post-conflict rehabilitation and unique EU accession process.

Mr. President,

Promotion and protection of human rights at the universal level remains one of the cornerstones of the UN role in the world. Further development of the capacity of the Human Rights Council is of utmost importance to address seriously and efficiently urgent human rights situations and crisis. We place special attention to continuous improvement of fundamental human rights of women and girls in different post-conflict societies. Women and children do not have armies to protect them or trade unions to negotiate on their behalf. And yet, more and more women are becoming the primary breadwinners in their families. The empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in societies are prerequisites for security, economic opportunity, effective governance and social development. Croatia shall also continue with its active contribution to the work of the UN human rights fora, in particular safeguarding the rights of vulnerable society members such as the LGBT persons, promoting the moratorium on the use of death penalty and the right to conscientious objection to military service.

Mr. President,

In times of economic uncertainty, be it due to financial crisis or long-term poverty, some tend to play down the importance of human rights or consolidating democracy. Every day we witness sad realities of starving children, deaths from preventable communicable diseases, inadequate education and health systems and continuous degradation of the eco-system. Challenges we are facing require integrated solutions across interconnected issues and by further strengthening of multilateral architecture. We welcome the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference and encourage its follow-up process. We look forward to more energetic work on the implementation of sustainable development goals, which should complement existing commitments and encompass all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental - in a balanced and synergistic way. Economic recovery and environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth are among key challenges that our countries are facing, in an effort to mitigate the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, enhance energy security and create new engines for economic growth. Croatia sees the ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies as a cornerstone for the achievement of a balanced integration of the sustainable development.

Croatia is firmly devoted to participation in these processes, in particular in the fields of education and gender equality. Education is a sector which builds firm grounds to respond to the challenges of a Post-2015 Development Framework. Therefore, Croatia salutes the launching of the Secretary-General's "Education First" initiative, and is pleased that the Croatian President has been invited to the Group of Member States Champions.

Mr. President,

I have already mentioned Croatia's successful post-conflict transition. On top of being in NATO since 2009, next year Croatia will become the 28th member of the European Union. Our international engagement is visible and strong. Croatia has been an active participant of UN

peacekeeping missions and I praise our women and men who have risked their lives for the common good. We have been providing substantial contributing to international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and improve the living conditions of its people, highlighting the need for the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of women and children. Croatia is also actively participating in EU meetings at a time when this integration is intensively trying to find ways of coming out of the crisis and assuming its rightful place in the world.

Let me emphasize that Croatia greatly appreciates the role which the EU has been playing in the UN as a significant and positive force behind a number of initiatives. At the same time, for Croatia, the process of EU accession negotiations was primarily an exercise in institution building and state transition. We built a stronger state so we can play a more substantive role in the world affairs. The perspective of the EU membership has proved to be the main motivator and generator for social and political reforms. We want our neighbors in South-Eastern Europe to undertake the same demanding but rewarding road. We do not intend to assume a mentoring role in the region, but we stand ready to share our experiences and contribute constructively to the reforms in the neighboring countries based on democracy and European values. Peaceful and prosperous South-Eastern Europe is in Croatia's strategic interest. Our vision is not just a region devoid of war. We strive to achieve genuine political, societal and economic development. We want people, especially young women and men, to have better standards of life and better prospects, to live in a clean environment and in a well-organized state with fully-functioning institutions.

This reminds me of a quote by a Croatian public health expert Dr. Andrija Štampar, a man who founded the World Health Organization, who once said that, and I quote: "All people, regardless whether rich or poor, have the right to be healthy!" I agree. Only healthy and self-confident people can shape a healthy and progressive society. Ladies and gentlemen, it is our primary responsibility, individual and collective, to build such a world and bequeath it to our children.

Thank you.