



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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National Statement to the Opening of the General Debate of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Building Global Security and Prosperity

The Honourable Julie Bishop MP
Foreign Minister

(Check against delivery)

Mr President

As a freshly minted Foreign Minister, I am delighted to take part in this debate of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Only a few weeks ago, Australia held national elections – and chose a new government.

Only nine days ago, I was sworn in as Australia's 38th foreign minister.

A change of government is a significant national decision.

It has only happened seven times, in our country, since the Second World War.

Australia is an open, liberal democracy.

We recognise our good fortune in having an unbroken record of peaceful democratic transition stretching back to 1901.

The United Nations offers that same ideal of peace and order in relations between states.

It gives us a place to resolve our differences, to be heard on the concerns that matter most.

Building global security and prosperity

Mr President

There is an intrinsic connection between the security and stability of governments and economic development.

Good governments understand that providing a secure and stable environment for their citizens is their most fundamental task.

But that task is tied inextricably to the strength of their economy.

Economic growth, development and trade

Mr President

Economic growth, development and trade are the key drivers of national and international prosperity, and a vital support for global security.

This is why the new Australian Government will put economic diplomacy at the centre of our foreign policy.

We will promote responsible economic governance and open trading systems that support export oriented economies.

We recognise that a strong business sector, open trading rules and liberal foreign investment policies can foster economic growth and, with this, opportunities to achieve prosperity and security.

Strong economies give nations and their people an environment in which to build their lives.

To make choices for the lives they want to lead.

Strong, open economies foster sustainable growth.

We understand this from our experience in Australia and in our region.

Australia's economic success and high standards of living are anchored in reform efforts over many years. We liberalised our economy and unilaterally dismantled trade barriers and protectionist policies.

In our own region, as economies have opened, standards of living have improved.

We have witnessed the enormous growth of the middle class in South East Asia. Estimates suggest that approximately 145 million people will be considered middle class in 2015, up from 95 million in 2010.

In Asia more broadly, we expect a middle class of over 3 billion by 2030.

Indonesia, currently the world's 16th largest economy, is on track to be the world's 7th largest economy by 2030¹.

China and India are projected to become the first and third largest economies by 2030.

Over 290 million people in China were lifted out of poverty in the decade between 1999 and 2009.

Post-2015 Development Agenda

Mr President

The Secretary-General has rightly focused our attention this week on the needs of the poor, the commitment we made to them over a decade ago, and our vision for the future.

We need to finish the job on the Millennium Development Goals.

Beyond 2015, we must prioritise sustainable economic growth in the global development framework.

We must provide the opportunity for all people, including people with a disability, to lead healthy and productive lives, leaving no one behind.

We must support women's economic participation and empowerment.

The future of peace will be built on economic prosperity.

Aid is an important part of delivering sustainable economic growth around the world.

It plays a significant role in supporting economic reforms and good governance, promoting the rule of law, and building the productive capacity of trade related sectors.

¹ http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/asia-pacific/the_archipelago_economy

But it is the effectiveness of aid delivery that matters.

For example, infrastructure deficiencies that prevent developing economies from fully engaging in the global markets need to be overcome.

Estimates of infrastructure financing needs, including for the roads and ports required to facilitate trade, dwarf global aid.

According to the Asian Development Bank, Asia alone requires \$750 billion annually over the next decade to meet its infrastructure needs.

This compares to annual global aid flows of \$130 billion.

Only the private sector has the capacity to mobilise the financing necessary to meet these massive infrastructure investments.

There is a role for aid in helping to overcome the obstacles to investment. It must attract, but should never replace, private sector capital.

The returns are high. A joint report by the World Trade Organization and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development estimates that every dollar invested in aid-for-trade can lift exports from developing countries by \$8.

Trade liberalisation and economic growth

Mr President

We firmly believe that the economic growth of developing countries can be unlocked through trade.

Australia will continue to promote trade liberalisation through the World Trade Organization, through regional and sector-specific deals, and through bilateral free trade negotiations.

The Australian Government aims to build a network of bilateral and regional free trade agreements.

In the World Trade Organization we will work to rebuild the multilateral trading agenda.

Australia puts the highest priority on global economic reform and trade liberalisation as the best way to secure jobs and economic growth.

These will be key themes for us as we chair the G20 in 2014.

Human Rights

No-one should pretend that the economic sphere exists in isolation from other parts of our human experience.

Economic progress alone is not sufficient.

We need to ensure that all people around the world are free to exercise fully their economic, civil and political rights.

Australia was one of eight nations involved in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And in 1948, the Australian President of the General Assembly, our Foreign Minister Dr H V Evatt, oversaw the adoption of the Declaration.

Since then, Australia has been at the forefront of defending human rights globally and regionally in support of equality and fundamental freedoms.

Freedom from discrimination.

Freedom from slavery, torture, arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Freedom of speech, conscience and religion.

Freedom to work, to health, to education and to participation in the life of the community.

Importantly, these freedoms must extend to all women and girls including through equal access to employment, resources, education and health services.

And they must be underpinned by robust and independent legal systems to enforce economic, social and political rights.

Australia will continue to promote and protect human rights standards around the world.

That is why we are seeking membership of the Human Rights Council for the term 2018-2020.

Syria and the Security Council

Mr President

The situation in Syria is an urgent security and humanitarian crisis we must address.

Left unchecked, it will continue to cause great human suffering and further destabilise the region.

Along with the rest of the world, Australia has condemned the horrific chemical weapons attack on 21 August, as we have condemned the Assad regime's use of conventional weapons against its own people.

The first obligation of any government is to protect its own citizens. In 2005, leaders of all UN member states signed up to this principle in the World Summit outcome on the Responsibility to Protect.

So Australia, as current President of the Security Council, will co-sponsor the draft resolution before the Council that condemns in the strongest terms any use of chemical weapons.

The resolution will make clear – for the first time – that the use of chemical weapons is a threat to international peace and security, and in doing so set a new international norm which will help to deter future use.

And it says those responsible for using such weapons must be brought to justice – a call we strongly endorse.

We welcome that this draft resolution sets out in no uncertain terms that the Assad regime must comply fully with the requirement to destroy its chemical weapons.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons now needs strong international support for its role in the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

Australia will also continue to press for the Council to take action to assist the humanitarian effort in Syria. And of course provide our full backing to efforts to find a political solution in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué that leads to a cessation of violence and a political transition which meets the aspirations of all Syrians.

International and Regional Security

But we can't just focus on a single instance of global security.

For we are engaged on security challenges around the world, including in the Indo-Pacific region.

Through our Security Council membership, we draw on lessons learned from our experience in peacekeeping and peacebuilding and take forward initiatives that are meaningful to our region.

We welcome the strong support the Security Council gave to Australia's resolution yesterday on small arms and light weapons. These weapons are a major driver of many conflicts that are brought to the attention of the Council.

When Australia led the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) thirteen years ago with our friends from New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and other Pacific countries, one of the first tasks the Mission faced was to restore peace and security.

RAMSI moved quickly to secure the surrender of firearms – an early and decisive action which underpinned the peace that was built and maintained over the next ten years.

And women played a crucial part.

That is why throughout the Pacific we are supporting efforts to strengthen women's participation in policing through recruitment, retention, training and mentoring support.

In the Philippines, Australia is funding women's participation in peace processes that bring together Muslim, Christian and Indigenous women.

And we continue to build on our record on security, disarmament and peacekeeping. As co-author, we worked to secure the adoption of the world's first Arms Trade Treaty, which has now been signed by the majority of the UN membership, with a further 18 signatories during the course of this week.

Outside of the Council, we work directly with countries in our region, to build their security.

Australia commends the efforts of Timor-Leste and the g7-plus group of countries emerging from conflict, including Solomon Islands and Afghanistan, in their efforts to promote the rule of law, civil and political institutions and a strong private sector.

Conclusion

Mr President

The United Nations is a vital forum for the security and prosperity of our world. This is what Harry Truman, President of the United States at the time the UN was formed, imagined when he spoke of a "world fabric of international security and growing prosperity".

No community can build lives, families and nations in the absence of stability, predictability and security.

No country can assure the security of its people without an economy that offers them the dignity to pursue lives they value.

As you have made clear Mr President, the task the UN takes on this year and next – setting our vision for the post-2015 development agenda – is one that could set the course of humankind for decades to come.

On behalf of the people of Australia, I wish all nations well in taking on this work – and commit Australia to play its part.

Together, we will strive to build the prosperity that underpins and supports international peace and security.