

SIXTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN

Mr President; Mr Secretary-General; Heads of State and of Government; Ministers; Ambassadors; Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Spain, allow me, Mr President, to congratulate you on your new responsibility and to convey our resolute support and best wishes. Your capability, Ambassador Ashe, is an assurance of competence and effective work for the next twelve months.

Let me also thank your predecessor, His Excellency Vuk Jeremic, for his proficient work during the past year and wish him success in his new role.

Mr President,

This General Assembly is the hub of the international system.

Here, we all have the same rights, regardless of our size, population and economic development: this is the organ of the United Nations that embodies the sovereign equality of States.

Here, the decisions we take present before the international public a body of opinion that cannot be gainsaid: this is the debating chamber of global legitimacy.

Here, we are all permanent members and it is here where multilateralism takes on its full meaning and effect.

Mr President,

Spain has faith in the United Nations and is firmly committed to this Organisation because we subscribe completely to the purposes and principles it embodies.

Our commitment to the United Nations is not mere rhetoric: Spain is the sixth largest contributor to the UN budget, in both mandatory and voluntary contributions.

This commitment legitimises our aspiration to serve the goals of the United Nations from within the Security Council, in the 2015-2016 biennium. We shall do so in the same spirit of dialogue and consensus as on the previous occasion when this General Assembly placed its trust in Spain.

In the 10 years that have passed since then, my country has continued to demonstrate with words and deeds its resolve to faithfully serve the goals of the United Nations: to maintain international peace and security, to achieve the peaceful resolution of conflicts, to foster international development cooperation and to promote respect for human rights.

Mr President,

Maintaining international peace and security is a prerequisite for the progress of humanity.

Spain believes firmly in the threefold values of peace, security and development, which is why over 130,000 Spanish soldiers have served in UN peacekeeping operations and humanitarian missions all over the world since 1989. Spanish troops are currently serving under the United Nations' blue flag as part of UNIFIL, which has been working since 2006 to ensure peace and stability in Lebanon, in a particularly turbulent region.

Spain works to promote disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, and has taken an active part in the Arms Trade Treaty negotiations. We have also participated in various initiatives to prevent nuclear terrorism.

Spain has suffered the violence of terrorism and is well aware that new threats, emanating from non-State factions, call for a global response, through international cooperation. The UN Global Strategy against Terrorism must be implemented in full, and a Global Convention must be achieved against this menace that transcends frontiers.

The people of Spain know from experience that the responsibility for acts of terrorism lies with those who carry it out; this responsibility is sole, exclusive and non-transferrable, whatever its perpetrators may claim. Let us always honour the memory of the victims; this memory gives the lie – social and moral – to the legitimacy of any kind of terrorism.

Mr President,

Our commitment to working for peace and security in the world was made evident this year during the crisis in Mali. At the outset, Spain supported the AFISMA missions and, subsequently, the deployment of MINUSMA. Spanish troops in the European Union mission in Mali are training the country's armed forces, which are responsible for ensuring national sovereignty, territorial integrity and full respect for human rights.

Mali is defeating terrorism and has regained its territorial integrity. This is an undoubted success and one to be proud of. But it is only the first step. The return to constitutional order with the calling of Presidential elections marks the start of a second phase, to construct the open, inclusive institutions that are essential for the future of Mali. In the long term, we must continue to support development throughout the Sahel, as the only way to promote security, democracy and prosperity in the region.

In this Assembly we should all welcome the role being played by African organisations in this crisis. Special acknowledgment is due to the African Union, which this year celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Spain has very close ties with Africa. The concerns of the continent are our concerns, too. We participate in the African Union Summits and in funding NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) and we were the first non-African country to contribute directly to the budget of the African Union Commission.

Spain has launched a strategic partnership with ECOWAS and continues to strengthen ties with other regional organisations in the continent. We provide tangible, significant support for these commitments: over the past four years, Spain has contributed 100 million euros to ECOWAS and an equal sum to the African Development Bank.

Mr President,

For over two years we have been witness to the courageous and determined efforts of the Arab peoples to assert their dignity, consolidate their democratic systems and exclude those who promote violence and the violation of fundamental human rights. The road to democracy is not an easy one, but there cannot be, there must not be, any turning back. Democracy must be a project that is undertaken by all of society, working for coexistence and inclusion, a project based on dialogue, tolerance and respect for human rights. And in every country, this project - not only political, but also social and economic - must belong to that country.

To accompany these processes of democratic governance, Spain has launched the MASAR programme, aimed at governments and civil society in North Africa and the Middle East.

Mr President,

The Assembly is aware that the situation in Syria has become an intolerable, heart-breaking human drama, as well as a growing threat to regional and international peace and security.

The brutal attack with sarin gas against civilians in Damascus, confirmed by the report of the UN Mission, has been widely condemned among the international community, which firmly believes this act must not be repeated, nor go unpunished.

The proposal by Russia and the United States that will allow international control and the subsequent destruction of all stocks of chemical weapons in Syria has been applauded by all. It is now necessary for the Security Council to adopt a Resolution to establish a legally binding prohibition on the use of chemical weapons in Syria and to ensure their mandatory destruction. Much rests on this question. As the Secretary-General remarked, it constitutes a challenge to international security, one that if not resolved will represent a collective failure.

Spain firmly believes that only political dialogue between the parties will put an end to this increasingly violent conflict, as was highlighted by the Report presented to the Human Rights Council. Therefore, we support the efforts of the United Nations-Arab League Special Envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, to promote a political transition in Syria. Spain is confident of the success of the second Geneva Conference and, in this respect, I reiterate in this Assembly my call for the parties to demonstrate a

constructive attitude. Spain will continue to bolster the opposition forces, in order to ensure an orderly and inclusive transition to democracy.

Finally, it is essential to maintain the humanitarian effort to help reduce the suffering of the displaced population within Syria and that of the refugees in neighbouring countries.

In a related context, I wish to emphasise that the Middle East peace process is taking on a new perspective. Last year, in this very forum, it was decided by a significant majority to recognise Palestine as a UN Observer State. The current negotiations are perhaps the last chance to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting peace for two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace, security and prosperity. At this crucial time for the region, its political leaders, with the support of the international community, must take the bold decisions necessary to achieve this historic goal of peace, and thus promote stability in the region and the entire world.

Mr President,

My country is a staunch advocate of dialogue and the use of peaceful means for the settlement of disputes. We believe that conflict prevention is one of the main instruments for ensuring peace and security. Therefore, we have participated in the Peacebuilding Commission, in establishing the Alliance of Civilisations and in the creation, with Austria and Saudi Arabia, of the King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue.

We believe in mediation for the peaceful settlement of disputes; for this reason, we are a member of the UN Group of Friends of Mediation and from within this Group, together with Morocco, we have launched the Initiative on Mediation in the Mediterranean Region, which is already producing results.

This General Assembly has developed a consolidated, universal legal doctrine on decolonisation, which Spain has embraced wholeheartedly.

Once again, I must place before this Assembly the question of Gibraltar, a British colony, which this Organisation included, in 1963, in the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories awaiting decolonisation. This is the only such territory in Europe, and one that affects our own territorial integrity.

Since that date, the UK has ignored the mandate of the UN General Assembly and the commitment made to Spain in the 1984 Brussels Declaration.

This colonial anachronism continues to inconvenience the citizens of Gibraltar and the surrounding area. Resting its case on the legitimacy granted by the universal doctrine of this General Assembly, Spain once again reiterates its call to the United Kingdom to resume bilateral dialogue and regional cooperation.

The Western Sahara remains among the UN's unresolved issues. Spain supports the search for a fair, lasting and mutually acceptable solution, one that enables the self determination of the people of Western Sahara, within the framework of UN rules and in accordance with the principles and purposes of its Charter. Accordingly,

Spain fully endorses the work being done in this respect by the UN Secretary General and by his Personal Envoy.

Mr President,

I would like to highlight the contribution of Latin America and of its regional organisations to multilateralism. Their constructive input on global issues such as the environment and development is of fundamental importance.

During the forthcoming Ibero-American Summit in Panama, we will address global challenges in political, economic and social contexts, to offer joint responses.

Mr President,

This UN General Assembly has declared 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation.

The human right to water and sanitation is essential for sustainable development and the fight against poverty. For this reason, in 2008 Spain set up the Cooperation Fund for Water and Sanitation, endowed with one billion dollars for projects in Latin America.

Moreover, realising the strategic value of water for the preservation of peace and security, Spain and Algeria plan to launch a Water Strategy for the Western Mediterranean.

Thanks to the United Nations, we are all aware of the crucial importance of the fight against climate change; this is a direct, immediate priority.

Next year will be the year of Small Island Developing States. This will provide an excellent opportunity for us all to address the problems faced by these countries, which must be supported in their efforts to adapt to climate change and to alleviate its harmful effects. These countries, despite being those which generate least pollution, suffer most from its consequences.

Mr President,

Spain is a nation which offers solidarity and has made every effort to enable the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved. My country has channelled this solidarity through the UN multilateral system, as we believe this system guarantees the principle of neutrality in the allocation of funds, and will make it possible to effectively achieve the ultimate goal, that of eradicating poverty.

In 2007, Spain, together with the UNDP, established the MDG Achievement Fund, which has had a real impact on the lives of 20 million people through more than 130 programmes in 50 countries, disbursing almost one billion dollars. The evaluation of this Fund, which concludes its activities this year, will be a key reference both for analysing compliance with the MDGs and for developing the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Preparation of this Agenda will be the central theme of this 68th General Assembly. For Spain, the Post-2015 Agenda should be universal, focused on truly sustainable development and acknowledge the importance of open institutions in achieving inclusive growth.

Therefore, we must clearly define Sustainable Development Goals, completing the process that began in Rio de Janeiro last year, while not forgetting that only a little over two years remain to achieve the MDGs; although we can be pleased with the progress made in many areas, there is still a long way to go. As the Spanish economy regains strength and starts to grow again, we will support these efforts with generous, intelligent and effective investment in development cooperation.

The solidarity expressed by my country is also apparent in its support for humanitarian aid, with respect to which Spain is the world's eighth largest donor. In addition, thanks to the World Food Programme's humanitarian aid storage and distribution centre that we have built in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, the UN can respond to humanitarian crises in West Africa and the Sahel faster and more effectively.

Mr President,

Spain has always been a crossroads of cultures, religions and traditions; we are an open, pluralistic and tolerant country that respects and integrates diversity within globalisation.

The defence and promotion of human rights is a responsibility of the institutions and also one to which all citizens should contribute. Spain was the third country in the world to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and I urge other States to do likewise.

We also take special interest in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. In consequence, we were co-facilitators, with the Philippines, of the High-Level Meeting on Disability and Development which took place just a few days ago. I am proud to say that in recognition of this commitment, Spain has been granted the Franklin D. Roosevelt International Disability Rights Award, which Her Majesty Queen Sofia collected a few days ago in this very city.

We will also continue to support the work of UN Women, as we have done since its inception. Equality between women and men, the full participation of women in all areas, and real efforts to end violence against women and girls are all indispensable for development and constitute a priority for Spain, both nationally and internationally.

Mr President,

Our commitment to multilateralism is inseparable from our desire for a decisive, efficient United Nations.

For this reason, this General Assembly must address the question of the reform of the Security Council. This reform can only be achieved from a broad consensus

founded on the principles of accountability, transparency and cooperation, seeking to provide greater legitimacy and support for the Council's actions.

It is also necessary to bring the Organisation into line with its means and to rationalise resources so that, together, we may achieve more with less. Therefore, we unconditionally support the progress being made toward "System-wide Consistency" and "Delivering as One", to which Spain is a major contributor. On the other hand, the universality of the United Nations requires us to preserve multilingualism.

Mr President,

In 2005, Spain announced its candidacy to become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the biennium 2015-2016. My speech today has underlined the main reasons why I believe that Spain has demonstrated, not with declarations but with concrete actions, its readiness to serve the United Nations in the Security Council, with the same commitment to dialogue and solidarity that we have shown since our entry into the Organisation.

We have a single goal: the defence of human dignity. All our efforts for peace, freedom, democracy, justice, human rights and sustainable development are directed toward that goal.

Spain knows that its defence of human dignity will be more effective through the United Nations, just as the General Assembly of the United Nations knows that, in this endeavour, it can count on Spain.

Thank you very much.