



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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General Debate
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Statement by

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland
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(check against delivery)

Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, upon your election as President of the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly. You have the full support of Finland in your important task. We are very much looking forward to cooperating with you.

We have convened here in New York in a time which poses enormous challenges to the authority and credibility of the United Nations.

First, we are at a crossroads where we have to decide the future course to attain sustainable development. Speaking for Finland at the Rio + 20 summit I stressed that faced with advancing climate change and the accelerating loss of biodiversity we may, at best, have only a few decades time in which to reach ecological, social and economic sustainability. Decisive action based on a sense of urgency is needed to turn the tide globally before it is too late. Either we succeed in this together or we are going to perish together.

This week, we have taken stock of progress towards Millennium Development Goals. They have been a powerful tool to direct our action. In the near future, we are expected to agree on a new development agenda, a new set of goals, which in my view could be called Sustainable Development Goals. A green economy is not a luxury, but a prerequisite for poverty reduction and sustainability. In short, the new agenda must be even bolder and more ambitious than the previous one. Its implementation will require action in all countries.

Second, we are facing a failure of the United Nations to act in its core domain, in maintaining peace and security. 110 000 people have been killed and 2 million people have been forced to leave their homes in Syria, where a tragic civil war has been going on for two years. The United Nations has been unable to act to end this appalling bloodshed. This is another major challenge for the credibility of the United Nations.

Let me elaborate on these challenges.

With a more than threefold increase in of the world's population since the founding of the United Nation and with unprecedented technological progress and ever increasing exploitation of natural resources, the world has changed irrevocably. We now must arrange our existence with our natural environment in a new way.

Sustainable development is, as the Secretary General has stated, the pathway to the future. Ecological sustainability – respecting the planetary boundaries – is the foundation for all development. The alarming trend in climate change underlines the urgent need to heed these limits. We must work together towards a comprehensive climate agreement by 2015.

The consequences of climate change are already seen worldwide. The impacts are predicted to intensify in the coming decades. For instance, billions of people lack access to safe water sources and sanitation. Without radical reforms the number is expected to rise dramatically. There is also significant potential for conflicts over water and other natural resources in the coming years.

Considerable progress has been made in reducing extreme poverty. Millions of people have had a chance to lift themselves out of poverty. However, inequality still persists and in many cases increases both within countries and between them. In several countries not a single Millennium Development Goal will be attained. More than a billion people still live in extreme poverty, and they are falling behind.

Poverty can only be eradicated within the context of sustainable development. Development must be ecologically, economically and socially sustainable. It must be firmly anchored in human rights and the values encapsulated in the Millennium Declaration. Peace and security are a precondition for sustainable development.

The post-2015 process must also include a financing strategy for sustainable development. We are honored to be co-chairing together with Nigeria, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Developing Financing, mandated by the Rio+20 Summit. We will work hard to achieve a strategy proposal, which will be action oriented, inclusive and cover a broad range of different aspects of development financing.

I am convinced that sustainable development financing must be based on national resource mobilization and management. Nations should mobilize their own resources through inclusive economic action and through responsible international trade and investments. Developing national taxation systems and tax revenue collection as well as addressing unregulated capital flight and putting an end to illegal tax evasion and tax havens should be central elements in sustainable development financing. Our own national experience shows that taxation is an effective means of addressing inequality.

Direct Foreign Investment can be a driver for growth and development. Investment should be sustainable, accountable and adhere to corporate social responsibility in creating economic and social development. The present proliferation of bilateral investment agreements numbering already thousands is not the best way to manage investment flows and set the rules they should follow. As part of our efforts to promote sustainable and fair financial governance Finland supports efforts to create an international investment regime which is transparent, balanced and equitable.

The future Sustainable Development Goals must be universal, and they must integrate different dimensions of development. Fears that sustainable development would challenge the traditional development agenda are unfounded. These agendas are not competing but complementing each other.

We have to do our utmost to agree on a new way to sustainable development in the very near future. Our planet and its citizens cannot wait. We, the member states of the United Nations, are shouldering a great responsibility in this respect. We must be able to deliver as the United Nations.

We also have more traditional security challenges at hand. The conflict in Syria has seriously undermined the authority and credibility of the United Nations. The United Nations has not been able to act in its core domain, in maintaining peace and security. Both the Syrian government and the international community have failed to implement their Responsibility to Protect.

The situation in Syria started as a peaceful and justified call for reforms. The government's response then turned it into an increasingly violent conflict and a breeding ground for terrorist extremism. This has led to humanitarian suffering, which has already reached historical proportions.

The use of chemical weapons on August 21st near Damascus can be a turning point for the conflict. The universal condemnation of their use as a war crime for which those responsible must be brought to justice through referral to the International Criminal Court. Finland welcomes the agreement reached on a strongly worded Security Council resolution to collect and destroy chemical weapons in Syria under international control. There can be no impunity for the perpetrators of war crimes and other atrocities.

This agreement must be followed through with a political solution to the conflict. It is the only way to stop the violence. This means negotiations. The international community, the parties of the conflict and especially the UNSC must take responsibility for working towards political negotiations. We continue to support the initiative of the United States and Russia proposing a Geneva II conference, as well as the mediation by the UN and Arab League special representative Lakhdar Brahimi. All permanent members of the Security Council must shoulder their responsibility.

The humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people continues. We all have to intensify our work to help the refugees and support the neighboring countries bearing the heaviest burdens.

The United Nations will have to have a strong presence in Syria also after the arms have silenced. Finland stands ready to contribute to a possible UN peacekeeping operation to be established in Syria.

The resumption of direct final status negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis is the long awaited and most welcome news.

Since the Oslo agreement twenty years ago it has been clear that the best outcome for all parties is a two state solution which can accomplish the reign of peace and security for two peoples. We may still have at hand perhaps the last chance for such a resolution of the conflict. And when I say perhaps the last chance, it is not because I think there may be more chances later; rather it is because at worst the last chance may already have been missed. But it is our duty to still make the effort to achieve a negotiated two-state solution.

Finland commends Secretary Kerry's dedication and the personal commitment demonstrated by the parties. The entire international community must lend all its support for these negotiations to succeed, concrete and effective support. The role of the regional partners is crucial, and I welcome the efforts by the League of Arab States in reviewing the Arab Peace Initiative.

Situations in both Syria and in the Middle East between Israel and Palestinians have been subject of important mediation efforts. I call for stronger political will and determination to resolve these conflicts. The parties must work harder, and the Security Council, especially its permanent members, must shoulder their responsibility.

While these are still to meet with success I believe we also have ample evidence that mediation works. Measures under Chapter VI of the UN Charter deserve more attention, although sometimes action under Chapter VII is also needed. Finland and Turkey continue to co-chair the Group of Friends of Mediation and work to strengthen preventive diplomacy, including mediation, in the United Nations. Mediation can only succeed with political will from the parties and the international community. Successful mediation also calls for the full and equal participation of women at all stages. Women are certainly most often the victims of conflicts, but we should also understand that they are essential participants for any mediation efforts to bear long lasting successes.

Efforts to promote peace and security in the Middle East should go parallel with the pursuit of a long-time goal of the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. I encourage all regional parties to continue to engage constructively with the facilitator and the four conveners as well as with each other to pave the way for a conference on the establishment of such a zone.

All our failures and disappointments notwithstanding there has also been one true success story for the United Nations this year. I am referring to the Arms Trade Treaty, which was adopted in April after decades of efforts. It was a success not only for the United Nations system, but for the whole international community and the arms control regime.

The importance of this Treaty has been confirmed by the growing number of signatures after the 3rd of June when the ATT was open for signature. We hope and expect that the signature by the United States of the ATT will be followed by all the other permanent members of the Security Council as well. I would also like to congratulate those countries that have already now ratified the Treaty paving the way for its early entry into force. My own country, Finland, is well on its way of ratifying the ATT as soon as possible.

Only when the treaty enters into force and is implemented will it make a real difference in saving lives, minimizing human suffering, lessening criminality and threat to civilian population by providing highest common standards to trade in arms, ammunition and components. I would like to once again thank and congratulate the NGO community for its dedication and tireless efforts in favor of the ATT. They never lost their faith and pushed the governments hard to achieve this result.

Our work is not done yet. Together we must continue to get the 50 ratifications and more to support the ATT. We also need to persuade those countries which abstained in the vote to supporting regulated arms trade and the treaty to make it truly universal.

Finland, as one of the seven co-authors, has been from the beginning and will be in the future very much involved in the Arms Trade Treaty. This week the co-authors organized a high-level event to promote signatures for the ATT. We are also prepared to assist countries which have difficulties in ratifying and implementing the Treaty. When implemented the Treaty should have a major impact also on development particularly in the least developed countries, where conflicts are a major obstacle to development.

The success and failure of the United Nations ultimately depend on us, the Member States. There is no alternative to the United Nations. Let us give it a chance. This is what our people expect from us.

Thank you.