

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Borut Pahor,
President of the Republic of Slovenia, at the General Debate of the Sixty-eight Session of the
United Nations General Assembly**

Mr President,

I would like to congratulate you on your election and wish you every success. Let me also pay tribute to the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and thank him for his tireless efforts and leadership in promoting the ideals and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The ideal and principle that should guide us is creating a world in which everybody can live free from fear, free from want and in dignity. The UN has achieved many extraordinary successes and achievements in the past. But we also have to acknowledge some disappointing and frustrating setbacks and failures. I believe it is now more than ever that the UN must play a major role in international relations. Since we live at a time when the balance of global power is changing, we may experience the transfer of power from the “old world” towards new, rising global players. Thus far in history, this kind of global change has never ended without global conflict, and we established the United Nations in order to prevent such conflict in the future.

Less than twenty years ago, we witnessed events that shocked our human conscience: genocide in Rwanda, followed by Srebrenica and Darfur. We should have learned lasting lessons from these horrific events. We vowed never to let this happen again. We collectively endorsed the responsibility to protect human beings from mass atrocities and gross and systematic violations of human rights. And yet we failed again. We are faced with another human tragedy unfolding before our eyes in Syria. After more than two years of brutal violence against civilians, including women and children, we, the leaders of the world, have still not found a political solution in the framework of the United Nations. The unconscionable use of chemical weapons in Syria is not only considered a war crime. It is an assault against our common humanity. Has peaceful diplomacy failed again, and will the only way to stop the violence now be military intervention?

Sovereignty as responsibility implies that states are responsible for the wellbeing of their citizens. It does not give them a license to kill their own citizens. If states manifestly fail to protect their population, the international community has a responsibility to react. When faced with mass atrocities, indifference is not and will not represent an option. The report of the UN inspectors was clear, credible and impartial. The US-Russian agreement on the Framework for the Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons must be implemented without delay. Syria's accession to the UN Chemical Weapons Convention is a positive step. But this should not be seen as an opportunity for the Syrian Government to stall for time. Syria should comply immediately and fully or face consequences. It is important that diplomacy prevailed and brought the issue back to the UN and to the Security Council. The Security Council should live up to its responsibility and use all appropriate measures to comprehensively address the situation in Syria. Finding a political solution remains the only viable and lasting solution to the crisis and to ensure stability in the region. We support the timely convening of the Geneva II conference.

The Security Council has a primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security under the UN Charter. It exercises this responsibility on behalf of all of us. It has an obligation to deliver and fulfil the mandate entrusted to it by the international community. Especially in this period of tensions and challenges, the responsibility of the major UN Member States is even greater, since in recent years we have witnessed too many divisions in the Council that have impeded its ability to act in a timely manner. Decisive progress in Security Council reform is required to improve the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the Council. As part of this effort the permanent members should consider refraining from the use of a veto in situations of genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law.

We call upon the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. International Criminal Court is an essential pillar of a system of international justice and a powerful tool to ensure accountability and fight against impunity for the most serious crimes. It deserves our full support.

We must focus even more on addressing the root causes of conflicts and expanding our work on prevention, in particular to improve our ability to read the warning signs and trigger early action. The consequences of inaction far outweigh the risks of timely prevention and response, both in terms of money and more importantly in human suffering and lives. This was also a lesson learned in our neighbouring region, the Western Balkans. Enhancing mutual trust through open political dialogue is a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence and long-term stability. Slovenia and Croatia have therefore launched the Brdo process as a forum for high-level dialogue intended to strengthen relations and reconciliation among the countries in the region.

Last century was a very dark chapter in Europe and in human history. In August next year we will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. It brought about mass destruction of human life and new methods of warfare that were subsequently condemned by the civilized world. It was followed by the Second World War and ended with a decade of intrastate conflicts and genocides causing unimaginable human suffering. We cannot let that repeat itself in the 21st century. Let us use our conscience and our humanity as a weapon of choice, for everyone deserves to live in dignity and peace, feeling safe, with access to food and drinking water, with a decent job and adequate pay for it. Yet something so obvious seems to be very far from reality. It is our task to bring reality closer to our dreams.

Today's leaders of the world have a unique opportunity and possibility to influence our common future for many decades to come. This is why it is important not to lose focus on the successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and agree on the post 2015 agenda. Let us transform our vision of saving future generations from the scourge of war into reality. We have no time to spare. We have no right to fail.

