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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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Address to the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

His Excellency Frans Timmermans
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

This year we celebrate the centennial of the Peace Palace in The Hague, seat of the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, and symbol of the pursuit of peace by means of law. Next year we will commemorate the centennial of the first of two suicidal world wars which caused unspeakable human suffering, horrible crimes against humanity and oppression of half of Europe's population until the Berlin wall came down in 1989. Out of the ashes of these global conflagrations grew the desire of the peoples of the world to put an end to violent conflict, to guarantee human rights for every human being in every country. "Never again" is what humanity wanted. Unfortunately, so far it is not what we have been able to deliver to everyone.

During the festive celebrations this year in The Hague, which gave fresh impetus to the peaceful settlement of disputes, there were scenes of unspeakable violence in Syria, including the use of chemical weapons. More recently in Nairobi dozens of people were killed by terrorists. One of the victims was Dr Elif Yavuz, a young Dutch woman who was eight months pregnant with her first baby. My heart goes out to Dr Yavuz's family, to all the victims of the Nairobi attack and to their loved ones.

The powerlessness of the international community to put an end to abuses like these has led in the past to the establishment of new bodies and instruments. After the Second World War, the UN was founded and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Following more recent genocides, the International Criminal Court was established. The use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein led to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW. So the institutions and instruments are in place. The question is, what is preventing them from delivering? Perhaps the answer was given already four centuries ago by Baruch Spinoza when he wrote: "Peace is not the absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice".

It is my conviction that the international community must keep working on the project we launched a hundred years ago. We should follow the example of Dr Yavuz, who was committed to helping people suffering from HIV/AIDS and malaria. We should work to achieve her aims and

uphold her ideals. We should make clear that terrorism will never triumph. We should invest in the UN and support it as effectively as we can. Mr Secretary-General, we strongly support you and the message you gave here on Tuesday. We will join you on the road to peace, justice and development.

The Netherlands advocates a coherent agenda to strengthen the international legal order. A peaceful world demands a sustainable legal order and a powerful agenda for development. It demands a strategy for disarmament and a focus on human rights. These are the principles of the Netherlands' foreign policy. A partnership for peace, justice and development is thus the cornerstone of the Dutch candidacy for the UN Security Council in 2017-2018.

Peace and security

The world was shocked to discover that an attack with chemical weapons had taken place in Syria on 21 August. The attack violated one of the most important peremptory norms of international law. The 1925 Geneva Protocol, to which Syria is a party, bans the use of chemical weapons.

The situation in Syria poses a clear threat to international peace and security. The Netherlands calls on the UN Security Council to take concerted action to address this threat. Syria does not comply with the international norm that requires it to protect its civilian population. But the international community also has a responsibility. The Netherlands supports the proposal that permanent Security Council members should henceforth refrain from using their vetoes in votes on intervention to stop the mass atrocity crimes identified by the 2005 world summit. They should show they are serious about their responsibility to protect vulnerable populations, underlining our consensus that genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing must never be tolerated. As the Secretary-General said: those responsible for the atrocities in Syria should be held accountable, in accordance with international law. The use of chemical weapons is a war crime that falls under the Rome Statute. If the Syrian government itself sees no possibility of tracking down and prosecuting the guilty parties, it can ask the ICC to do so. If Syria makes no request, the Security Council must take action. Finally, as the Secretary-General also said, we can hardly be satisfied with the destruction of chemical weapons while the wider war continues to destroy Syria. A peaceful solution is needed. And the women of Syria should be involved in making this happen, as there can be no solution without

them. UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security provides an outstanding tool for promoting inclusive conflict resolution. This week at the General Assembly we have hosted a side-event marking the importance of women's political participation for successful transitions in the Middle East and North Africa. The Executive Director of UN Women told me earlier this week that courage is every woman's middle name. It certainly is in Syria.

Middle East

The Netherlands supports John Kerry's efforts to encourage Israel and the Palestinian Authority to arrive at a two-state solution through direct negotiations. The international community should support the Israeli-Palestinian talks. Only a political solution can lead to lasting peace.

Broader security issues

Fifty years ago US President John F. Kennedy expressed the fear that in the 1970s there would be 15, 20 or even 25 nuclear weapons states. Thanks in part to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, this danger was averted. But the risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons has not receded. While much has been achieved in the field of disarmament, we still have a long way to go. In his speech in Berlin in June 2013, President Obama warned of the danger of nuclear weapons. "As long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe," he said – and he is right. He plans to take new steps to reduce strategic nuclear arsenals. He also wants to make substantial reductions in the number of US and Russian non-strategic weapons in Europe. The Netherlands favours these steps, strongly supports these efforts and wants to contribute to them.

March next year, the Nuclear Security Summit will begin in The Hague. My country's hosting of this summit is in keeping with our tradition as a country of peace, justice and security. Nuclear materials can play an important role in curing our illnesses and heating our houses. And fortunately, the likelihood of terrorists using nuclear materials in an attack is small. But if it did happen, the consequences for the world would be very serious indeed. The Nuclear Security Summit is meant to give fresh impetus to global efforts to ensure nuclear security and prevent nuclear terrorism, by making and implementing agreements at the highest multilateral level. Governments, businesses, researchers and organisations from many countries are working together to reduce the quantities of nuclear materials, to enhance the security of the materials that remain, and to combat nuclear smuggling.

Justice

The centennial of the Peace Palace is a good occasion to highlight the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Netherlands used the celebrations to strengthen instruments for peaceful settlement. We advocate taking three interrelated steps:

- We need to encourage countries to recognise compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. As UN member states we recognise the ICJ as a principal organ of the United Nations. In my view, recognising its compulsory jurisdiction is a logical and necessary next step.
- Secondly, we must help countries realise how useful and flexible arbitration is as a way of settling disputes. The Security Council and the General Assembly could draw parties' attention to this instrument more often, and we should advocate it more in the public debate.
- Thirdly, we must reduce the obstacles to the peaceful settlement of disputes by making alternatives available. This is why the Netherlands enthusiastically supports the UN Department of Political Affairs and NGOs that promote mediation.

In his 2011 report on the Responsibility to Protect, the Secretary-General rightly pointed out the importance of mediation as a means of preventing atrocity crimes. National legal systems are the foundation of the international legal order. Strengthening national legal systems should make it possible to keep the courtrooms of the International Criminal Court closed. The ICC is inextricably linked to the global chain of legal institutions. It delivers justice in the wake of international crimes, thus helping to prevent future offences. So it is crucial that countries continue to accede to the Rome Statute and that popular support for it is maintained. We need to ensure that countries that have acceded to the Statute continue to work with the ICC.

Human rights

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 20th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration. The Universal Declaration is an enduring source of inspiration. It was adopted without a single dissenting vote, under the inspired leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt, who acted as a change agent before the term was coined. Before the vote she rightly said, "We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind."

The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna underlined that human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

Twenty years after Vienna, the blueprints of our human rights infrastructure are complete. Now it is time to ensure the necessary implementation, political will, capacity, financial resources and treaty body reforms. To that end, Dutch human rights policy stresses the importance of forging different trilateral partnerships in different regions. We focus especially on protecting human rights defenders and promoting LGBT and women's rights.

Development

Without development there can be no global peace and security. We are fast approaching 2015, and have made great progress. In the next two years we can still make a difference and advance towards the Millennium Development Goals.

The post-2015 agenda will also benefit from a single, unified framework: we cannot talk about the plight of the world's poorest people in isolation from the environmental problems endangering life on our planet. It is crucial to ensure that development is sustainable, so we can balance and integrate its economic, social and ecological dimensions. Peace, security and the rule of law constitute a fourth vital element of sustainable development. The key words for the post-2015 agenda are better aid, more trade and stronger policy coherence for sustainable development. Also, we need to promote women's rights. This includes sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as equal opportunity. I have four children, two of them girls. It would be unbearable for me as a parent if they did not have equal opportunity.

It goes without saying that a nation that was built by claiming its lands from the sea, is concerned when rising sea levels might endanger that claim. Therefore, we feel a strong solidarity with other countries that are threatened in the same way. The Netherlands wants to strengthen the synergy between climate and poverty reduction policies, particularly in the field of water and food security.

Closing

I'd like to close today with a quotation. "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing." This is what British Prime Minister Chamberlain said exactly 75 years ago, on 27 September 1938, in a radio address on the Sudeten crisis. Czechoslovakia was dismembered shortly afterwards. This was not just the fault of the signatories of the Munich Agreement. The entire international community looked the other way, especially Czechoslovakia's fellow democracies in Europe, including my own country.

Today we can no longer pretend to know nothing of quarrels in far away countries or of the people who live there. If we fail, it is not because of the deficiency of the legal instruments that we have developed. It is because of the international community's deficient sense of responsibility. It is our duty to take responsibility in addressing what is happening in Syria. The Secretary-General talked earlier this week about leadership and identified Nelson Mandela as a shining example. On Syria, we should follow the Secretary-General's lead and make peace and justice a reality.

Investing in the UN is an investment in our common future. We are shareholders with a long term interest. We need to have the instruments for peace, justice and development ready for the moment they can help avert catastrophe. That is why we invested in the OPCW, which now proves crucial in the Syrian crisis. That is why we should invest in the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Security Council. That is why we should work as hard as we can to come up with a clear and ambitious post 2015 sustainable development agenda. We are all in this together, we should invest together in our United Nations.

Thank you.