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The general debate of the 68th session of the United Nations
General Assembly

H.E. Mr. Espen Barth Eide
Minister of Foreign Affairs

President, excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

We are living in times of rapid change. Global and regional dynamics are transforming global governance.

A changing world will inevitably change the United Nations.

But we, the members of this great organization, can influence the direction of change. In order to do so, however, we must make strategic priorities. We should develop an agile multilateral system for the 21st Century.

The architects of this United Nations were in many ways ahead of their time. The Charter foresaw a world where the UN should safeguard international peace and security, the settlement of disputes, and the promotion of common interests at regional – just as much as at the global – level.

By 1945, however, there were few established regional mechanisms. In other words; the Charter's provisions for regional arrangements were largely aspirational.

President,

In today's world, regional organizations and arrangements are increasingly proving their relevance. The formulation of norms and values, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the promotion of economic integration is increasingly taking place at the regional level.

(Check against delivery)

Cooperation and integration is not only about outcomes but also of processes. Practical cooperation can lay the foundations for strategic trust and shared values.

It was only after two horrific wars during the last century that my own continent chose close integration. This was instrumental for the creation of a peaceful Europe. For this historic achievement, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo last year.

The African Union has seen their Continent through 50 transformative years. Freedom came at a high price. Yet, Africa has never been more prosperous than it is today. We see economic growth, improving governance, and enhanced regional cooperation.

From Somalia to Mali, the African Union and its sub-regional partners continue to prove their importance. It is, beyond doubt, becoming one of the UN's most important regional partners. I commend the AU for its dedicated efforts, and I want to express my deepest condolences for the tragic loss of life in the heinous terrorist attack in Nairobi.

We must never allow terrorists to set the agenda. Hence our efforts to work with the AU to promote peace and stability in Somalia at this crucial moment must be redoubled.

Over the last years, Norway has worked with the people of Colombia to lay the foundations for lasting peace between its Government and the FARC movement. In doing so, we have seen the strong commitment from Colombia's neighbors. Here, as everywhere else, we have learned that peace cannot just be established within one country, it has to be established in a regional context.

In South-East Asia, ASEAN is becoming the source, as well as the architect, of regional stability. I commend ASEAN for their constructive role in supporting the democratic reform process in Myanmar. Myanmar will chair ASEAN next year, which in many ways is a testimony to the organization's adaptability.

Just like in South East Asia, Norway, and our fellow arctic states, have built our deepened cooperation on one of the most salient organizing principles of this United Nations; the Law of the Seas convention.

And we reach out to each other. Earlier this year, Norway acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South East Asia. Likewise, again during this spring, China, Japan, India, the Republic of Korea and Singapore joined the Arctic Council as observers. In doing so, they subscribe to the founding principles of the Arctic Council; principles that – yet again – are a direct reflection of key a United Nations norm.

Where I live, we observe global warming at close quarters. As the polar ice cap melts, we are reminded of our shared responsibility for saving the planet's climate. Today, the Arctic Ocean is opening up to human activities in ways hard to imagine only a few years ago. Over the last decade, we have strived to develop forward-looking strategies for the safe management of this new maritime crossroads between Asia, Europe and North America.

President,

This emergence of regional institutions as a feature of global governance is in fact good news for the United Nations.

We need a UN that can be a catalyst that supports regional developments, which reinforces our common global and multilateral agenda.

President,

The Middle East has yet to find an effective regional architecture. It is also a part of the world that is causing considerable concern these very days.

Israel and Palestine are facing a moment of truth. This month we mark 20 years since the Oslo accords. We have witnessed positive achievements on the ground. State institutions have been built and are ready for statehood. But the political process has yet to be delivered. Time is running out for a negotiated two-state solution.

But now, as Palestinian and Israeli leaders have returned to negotiations, hope is renewed. This afternoon, in this building, I chaired a meeting of the international donor group for Palestine, the AHLC. The donors reaffirmed their commitment to providing necessary assistance to the Palestinian Authority through the current transition to statehood.

This may be the last chance; a chance we cannot afford to miss.

President,

As we speak the horrors in Syria are continuing. Thousands upon thousands of children, women and men are being killed and maimed. Millions are fleeing their homes.

The use of Chemical Weapons is utterly unacceptable, and is a grave violation of international law. Those responsible must be brought to justice and the case referred to the ICC.

The Syrian crisis can only be solved through a political solution.

The UN Security Council must now live up to the responsibility that we, the members of the UN, have entrusted in them.

Humanitarian access must be ensured by all parties and to all areas.

The bloodshed in Syria must come to an end.

President,

Frustrated by Syria, many have criticized UN for its inability to act.

However, we should not lose sight of UN's many achievements.

Every single day, the UN provides shelter for refugees, vaccinates children, promotes maternal health, and stabilizes fragile states.

Evolving norms of human security have placed new issues on the agenda. Children and Armed Conflict, Women, Peace and Security and Protection of Civilians are recent examples of the UN's important normative role.

President,

Faced with scarce resources, accentuated by a global economy under pressure, we should increase, not decrease, the flexibility of the Secretary General. Last autumn, this Assembly decided that the 2014–15 budget should be cut by one hundred million dollars. Reducing the budget whilst increasing the number of tasks, is a recipe for a weaker, not a stronger UN. This Assembly must be coherent in its policy.

The role of this Assembly should be to provide guidance, not to micromanage.

To conclude, President,

To meet the regional and global challenges of our time, we the member states must work together to fulfil the aspirations and potential of the UN Charter.

Thank you.