



THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

SIXTY-EIGHTH SESSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

by

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

New York, 25 September 2013

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour to address you on behalf of the Republic of Serbia and inform you about the positions held by my country on some of the important global issues, developments in and around Serbia, as well as the efforts that Belgrade has made with a view to reaching a just solution to problems facing the country and its neighbourhood.

Distinguished Mr. President, Your Excellency Mr. John William Ashe, I would like to thank you, first of all, for your excellent stewardship and organization of this debate and leadership demonstrating in this high post.

I wish you every success in the performance of your duties as President of the General Assembly, assuring you that in the discharge of your mandate you will enjoy the support of the Republic of Serbia. You may count on its assistance in the materialization of your ideas.

At the same time, I would like to congratulate your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremic, the former President of the General Assembly, on his courage and impeccable presiding over this august assembly in the past year, and on his demonstrated understanding for problems encountered in all parts of the world. He represented Serbia in a dignified manner, while being at the same time an impartial professional of high standing.

The Republic of Serbia attaches great importance to the United Nations and the activities and cooperation carried out within its framework. We remain true to the Charter of the United Nations and the purposes and principles enshrined therein. We will endeavour, to the extent of our possibilities, to make a contribution in their implementation.

We are also determined to participate in the new initiatives taken within the United Nations.

I welcome the well-chosen theme for this year's session. The Post-2015 Development Agenda and the preparations to be made in order to define a future global development framework are important issues, and the General Assembly is the right forum for holding discussions, and more importantly, agreeing on them.

I am confident that the current General Assembly session will be successful in the consideration of the agenda items annotated by its President, namely contribution of women, youth and civil society to the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Human rights and rule of law in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ahead of the deadlines running out for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals to which the Republic of Serbia fully subscribes, the United Nations and the world of today are at a crossroads. The initiated process is an ambitious and complicated one.

Even the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development entitled "The Future We Want" makes it incumbent upon us to take action.

I hope that the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Sustainable Development will be a success. The Republic of Serbia appreciates the opportunity, given to it as a member of the Group, to help in the drafting process aimed at establishing Sustainable Development Goals. On our part, we will do our utmost to contribute towards defining the Sustainable Development Goals in clear terms. We believe that the SDG's should be global in nature but, at the same time, implementable in all countries that differ so much in their capacity, level of development, priorities and policies.

It goes without saying that in identifying the SDG's, priority should be accorded to energy efficiency, renewable sources and climate change.

Key development goals should deal with sustainable economic development, because devoid of it, it would be impossible to achieve social development, reduce hunger and poverty, unemployment and inequality, prevent further wage level disparities and protect the environment.

I expect that attention will also be focused on putting in place a global economic mechanism to prevent the spill-over of economic shocks from the developed to developing countries and the destabilization of international financial markets.

In this process, the voice of the have's and have not's should be equally valued. The less developed countries should highlight the problems, and the developed ones should act as partners in their resolution.

As the new member of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations in 2014-2016, the Republic of Serbia will join all the Council activities related to the MDGs and the definition of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

However, there can be no development - sustainable or unsustainable, economic or social - in war-torn areas.

Even today, at the beginning of the 21st century, there are, unfortunately, many war zones across the world.

My country has been participating in UN-led peacekeeping operations for decades already. In many continents, the memories of our contribution to the peace efforts are still very much alive. We will apply the lessons learned to find solutions to specific problems in the field and to improve the capacity of our peacekeepers in their response to the challenges faced in carrying out their mandates, with a view to achieving maximum performance.

Serbian servicemen and policemen engaged in multinational operations in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Lebanon, Cyprus, the Middle East region, Uganda and in the Somali waters, and soon in Mali as well, are all representing their country in a proper way, reflecting its orientation to act as a factor of peace.

We are prepared to increase, in the next period, the size and standard equipment of our contribution to the national contingents and to make use of the available UN stand-by arrangements.

In line with our policy based on Security Council resolutions, we are also going to promote the participation of our servicewomen in peace missions.

Serbia's engagement in UN missions and other multinational operations is our concrete contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security. The Republic of Serbia has no ulterior motives behind sending its troops to other countries other than to provide assistance. For this reason, we would like to see that the personnel of the Serbian Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior are welcome and accepted both by the governments of the friendly countries to which they are deployed and their local populations; that they see them as partners and support, rather than as foreign troops and occupying forces.

When seconding its personnel for multinational operations, Serbia has no other interest - military, political or economic - but to help the friend in need and show to other contingents contributing to the operation that its troops may be counted upon to help.

Apart from wars, there is another omnipresent global danger looming large over the core values of the United Nations. That danger is terrorism which poses a threat to fundamental human rights and presents an obstacle to business, thus undermining development as well.

As a State Party to most international counter-terrorism conventions, the Republic of Serbia attaches great significance to the international activities aimed at suppressing terrorism. It is adjusting its domestic legislation to stem this scourge. We unequivocally support the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and all the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations.

Serbia, as a victim of terrorist attacks, which even took the toll of children as the most innocent segment of its population, understands very well the need for regional and broader counter-terrorism cooperation.

Because terrorism knows no boundaries, members of the United Nations have to be ready to cooperate without compromise, without prejudice and any limitations, without making any exceptions or special cases where terrorist actions would be allowed against one's own people, under the pretext of freedom fighting.

In this context, it is of the utmost importance to make progress on the adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Serbia strongly condemns terrorism in any shape or form, as well as acts of terrorism regardless of who the perpetrator may be, or where such acts may be committed and for whatever purpose in mind.

On the other hand, no-one has the right, Serbia included, to limit itself only to statements made in condemnation. Victims of terror, those injured in the attacks or the families of victims worldwide have the right to demand that persons responsible for such acts be brought to justice and that an end be put to any further recruitment of terrorists and financing of their organizations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Republic of Serbia attributes great importance to the promotion and protection of human rights and is striving to comply fully with the internationally recognized standards in this field. Serbia has made a step forward regarding the enjoyment of human rights by minority groups, particularly national minorities, children and women, as well as persons with special needs.

Serbia's Law on the protection of the rights and freedoms of national minorities surpasses international conventions, in many aspects. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia unambiguously prohibits assimilation of national minorities and undertaking of measures designed to cause artificial altering of the ethnic structure of the population in territories where national minorities traditionally live in larger numbers.

The Republic of Serbia is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. Dozens of ethnic groups and several religious communities live there peacefully, and its tradition of living side-by-side, tolerance and respect of others has been long, genuine and deep-rooted.

Drawing upon our own experience, we have whole-heartedly embraced the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. We have been actively promoting inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue in all domains and at all levels, as this is the best way of overcoming divisions caused by cultural, linguistic, religious or any other diversity.

Generally, in the period under review, Serbia has achieved considerable progress in the protection of human rights, as noted in the presentation of the Second Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, in January 2013, and during the visit to Belgrade by Her Excellency Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We are ready to share our expertise and experience in the human rights field with our friends across the world. The Republic of Serbia sees such cooperation as a friendly exchange and not as interference in the internal affairs of other countries, or as a one-sided and irresponsible preaching and tutelage, accompanied by conditions or blackmail.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Republic of Serbia is a party to nearly all international instruments and initiatives in the fields of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It fully complies with the obligations it has undertaken.

Serbia's commitment to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which we recently signed, is based on the belief that the establishment of legally binding international standards in this field is a significant contribution to eliminating illegal arms trade, the fight against international terrorism and organized crime, promotion of peace, security and stability – or in a nutshell - alleviation of human suffering.

In accordance with the agreements it has entered into, my country has counted and made an inventory of all weapons in its possession and has made this information available. It has also allowed inspection of its arsenals. Our partners know where each piece of Serbian weaponry is located. Nothing is kept secret.

We have done so, not only because we were bound to do so, but to show and prove that Serbia is truly committed to peace and cooperation with the neighbours. And, contribution to peace can be made also through disarmament. Never in its history has Serbia fought a war of aggression, and the weapons now in its possession are only meant for its defence.

Furthermore, Serbia has never posed a threat to any country; it has never possessed weapons of mass destruction, and has no intention of making weapons of mass destruction part of its visible quantifiable and verifiable arsenal.

We are aware that progress on disarmament and arms control hinges not only on us. In this context, success is related to developments on a wider political and strategic scene.

In a little more than a year since I took office, I have visited almost all the countries that Serbia borders on. I talked to the leaders of all neighbouring countries and at international events, as well. In this way, I wanted to send a message that Serbia has opted for regional cooperation and working together with its neighbours to address the problems we share in common.

I have made, on behalf of Serbia, symbolic gestures effectively demonstrating that we wish to reconcile with the peoples living with us side by side. I am confident that these gestures will significantly contribute to reconciliation and that they will help right the wrongs of the past.

We are now looking forward into the future.

It is our desire to build good relations with all our neighbours; to inter-connect by new roads, railways and bridges; to jointly appear on international markets; to network our energy systems; to protect the environment; to cooperate in disaster relief; to develop cross-border projects; to trade; to expand our cultural, scientific, educational, technological and sports cooperation. Our common goal is to improve the living standards of the population in all countries of the region.

With our neighbours we can compete only in terms of higher level of human rights protection achieved, whereas in all other respects we are to cooperate, as well as help and encourage each other to perform better.

Serbia's message to its European partners is that the time of conflicts, distrust and disputes is behind us. My country is looking forward to the times ahead and its European Union membership.

I trust that Serbia, as decided, will open its EU accession negotiations not later than January 2014. I hope that I will be able to inform the next General Assembly session on the conduct of the negotiations themselves that will, I believe, not last long or indefinitely, as well as on Serbia's continued progress towards its full membership of the European Union. At the same time, Serbia has revived the old and forged new friendships in the world. We have been creating strategic partnerships in the East, West, North and South.

Serbia has been active in all regional initiatives and organizations, and has chaired some of them in the previous period. Our leadership of them has been highly assessed by their other members, as a result of which the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has entrusted Serbia with its Chairmanship-in-Office in 2015.

The agreed and jointly won consecutive OSCE Chair-in-Office – first by Switzerland in 2014 and then by Serbia in 2015 – serves as a good example also to other countries of how to cooperate in international organizations.

Serbia will be given the opportunity to make a concrete and constructive contribution to the enhancement of the OSCE, especially in view of the fact that 2015, exactly during our Chairmanship-in-Office, will mark the 40th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, one of the most important OSCE documents.

I am confident that our activity in regional initiatives and the incoming OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office will also recommend Serbia for taking on greater responsibility within the UN system and, consequently, being entrusted with other responsible duties when the time comes.

Dear friends,

The unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo in 2008 has been creating a problem, undermining the system established by the United Nations ever since its inception. The illegal secession attempted by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo has never been recognized by the United Nations, but a number of countries, in disregard of the international legal system, have recognized Kosovo as an independent state.

Under constant pressure and blackmail of big and powerful countries, some other countries - including the traditional friends of Serbia - have unfortunately recognized Kosovo as a state.

Serbia responded to such acts in a measured, diplomatic and political way, precluding any use of force to safeguard its sovereignty and unity of its territory.

On rare occasions would a country, faced with a situation where its vital national interests are at stake, demonstrate such a level-headedness.

We are convinced that problems, including the status of Kosovo and Metohija, should be resolved peacefully. For this reason, we heeded the call of the United Nations General Assembly in 2010 (A/RES/64/298) to enter into negotiations with representatives of the authorities in Pristina.

Owing to the important facilitation efforts of Her Excellency Lady Catherine Ashton, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union, we have made arrangements with the Albanians of Kosovo and Metohija.

Serbia has thus shown that its intention was to protect the Serb community in Kosovo and Metohija as far as possible, but to ensure a normal everyday life to all inhabitants of the Province, as well.

I underline that Belgrade and Pristina have reached agreement only over clearly defined matters like, for example, municipal elections and the establishment of the Community of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo and Metohija, and that the Republic of Serbia has not recognized either *de iure* or *de facto* the independence of Kosovo.

The First Agreement reached - which we promised to respect in full - does not mean in any way that the Republic of Serbia intends to agree to the admission of Kosovo to membership in the United Nations and other international organizations, initiatives or *fora*, where membership is solely the prerogative of sovereign nations.

The United Nations has been present in Kosovo and Metohija for more than 14 years.

We trust the United Nations which was vested with administering this part of Serbia in 1999. We therefore request that the mandate of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) should remain unchanged, that its staff should not be downsized and that its activities should be reinforced.

The role of UNMIK is indispensable. It should coordinate the work of all international factors present in Kosovo and Metohija in a status-neutral framework, as foreseen in Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). The resolution defined the tasks of the United Nations there, reaffirming that Kosovo and Metohija is a province forming an integral part of the Republic of Serbia.

We also support the activity of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). We request that the European Union, where Serbia is irreversibly headed, respect its own principles as far as Kosovo and Metohija is concerned.

By keeping a status-neutral approach, we expect EULEX to continue its assistance in the development of the democratic institutions in the province and in the observance of the human rights of Serbs and other non-Albanians, because it is only their fundamental human rights that are being threatened.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When Serbia is concerned, there is yet another task before the United Nations and another issue weighing on the conscience of its Member States that must not remain unresolved, so that neither I nor the presidents that will come after me, have to seek justice and repeat that no crime has been resolved yet.

I wish to recall that the Special Rapporteur of the Council of Europe, Mr. Dick Marty, a Senator from Switzerland, has proved and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) confirmed that some of the current Albanian leaders in Kosovo and Metohija organized the kidnapping and killing of Serbs whose organs were clandestinely harvested and sold.

We were not in a position to institute proceedings in court for these crimes committed at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, crimes which have, thus far, been seen nowhere else in the world. We continue to hold the view that it is necessary that the United Nations also be included in the investigation into these crimes, carried out on the basis of the Council of Europe report on illicit organ trafficking.

I appeal to you, dear friends, to support Serbia in its efforts to have the truth about these and other crimes come to light and that those found responsible be sentenced.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In April of this year, I spoke before this assembly, in the thematic debate on the role of international criminal justice in reconciliation, about the work of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia after 1991.

I said then that the ICTY (Hague Tribunal) abused the mandate given to it by the Security Council; that it did not help the reconciliation process in the territory of the former Yugoslavia; that it compromised the idea behind international criminal justice; that it acted under political pressure; that it was not independent; that it ruled differently in similar circumstances; that it acquitted some war criminals and, in a number of instances, even failed to indict some of them; that it humiliated Serb victims of the wars of Yugoslav succession; that it attempted to revise history...

I continue to uphold the same views that I presented on that occasion. This, in fact, reflects the Serbian opinion on the work of the Tribunal.

By accepting the integrity of the Tribunal, we have acquired the right to criticise its work but to propose a solution as well.

Without intending only to be critical of this institution, Serbia nevertheless suggested certain measures which might, at least to an extent, redress some of the wrongs done by the Tribunal.

We request the United Nations and the ICTY to find a legal way which would ensure that convicted Serbs be sent to serve their prison terms in Serbia, in order that the purpose of punishment could be achieved more effectively, primarily through their facilitated reintegration into society.

This does not mean that we challenge the reached verdicts on merit or treat as relative the crimes that these persons have committed, but we simply want to facilitate their return to normal life in the community, once they are out of prison.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

Serbia respects every Member State of the United Nations and offers each and every one of them a hand of friendship and trust, expecting to be reciprocated in equal measure.

Serbia of today and tomorrow should be trusted.

Thank you, Mr. President.