



New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Te Māngai o Aotearoa

UN General Assembly 70

New Zealand statement

Delivered by Right Honourable Mr John Key
Prime Minister of New Zealand

1 October 2015

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NEW ZEALAND
UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY COUNCIL
2015-16

Mr President.

The 70th anniversary of the United Nations is a good opportunity to reflect on the organisation.

For most of us, the United Nations has been one of the key international realities of our lives.

It has been at the heart of and has shaped the significant developments of the post-World War II era.

But, as we all know, it is not perfect.

A lot can be said about the shortcomings of the UN.

They are many and some are serious.

But there are things this Organisation can do that no other international body can.

And it remains the key reference point for States when there is a problem.

That is why New Zealand fought so hard for its seat on the Security Council.

We sought election because the Council is the primary body for the maintenance of international peace and security.

New Zealand is a small country at the bottom of the world.

Despite being far away from many of the world's trouble-spots, we are not immune from their consequences.

This time last year, I pressed the case for New Zealand's election to the Security Council.

I would like to thank the Member States for their faith in us.

In the last nine months we have strived to repay this.

Much of the debate in this Chamber this week has been about where the United Nations – particularly the Security Council - has not performed.

The conflicts and human suffering in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and a long list of other countries, show how far we are from achieving the aspirations of our founders and of today's members.

So too does the lack of progress in bringing peace to the Middle East.

Since we have been on the Council, we have found it as hard as many of you warned.

The Council's agenda is lengthy and contentious.

The dynamics within it are difficult.

When Council members work together, as they did with the recent agreement over Iran's nuclear capability, they can still deliver on the Council's role as set out in the Charter.

The Iran deal was a notable bright spot this year.

While it was negotiated in Vienna, only the Council had the power to implement it.

New Zealand is proud that this occurred during our Presidency in July.

Now, the deal needs to be implemented and its example needs to be followed.

That is because this important agreement must become the basis for something wider - a fundamental reset of relationships, and a foundation for the resolution of other regional conflicts.

Nowhere is the re-setting of relationships needed more than in Syria.

Syria has been torn apart by internal divisions and a leader prepared to wage war on his own people to cling to power.

External actors, both from within the region and beyond, have tried to tilt the balance in pursuit of their own interests.

And as the country descended into lawlessness, the evil nightmare of ISIL that first took hold in Syria spread death and terror into the region and beyond.

ISIL's warped ideology and unprecedented use of social media to export its twisted message is a threat to us all, even to a country as distant as New Zealand.

It is because of this that New Zealand joined the international coalition against ISIL.

We are doing what we can to help the victims of the Syrian conflict and to combat the scourge of ISIL.

New Zealand's armed forces are helping the government of Iraq to train its soldiers to defend its people.

In response to the humanitarian crisis we are helping fund programmes in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to assist their efforts to support thousands of displaced refugees.

Like many other countries we are also implementing an emergency Syrian refugee resettlement programme.

None of this gets to the root of the problems in Syria.

All Council members carry responsibility for ending the misery in Syria and beyond.

The consequences of inaction are not theoretical. The human toll is real.

A three-year-old boy dead, washed up on a Turkish beach; hundreds of thousands killed and millions forced to flee their homes.

We cannot ignore the huddled travellers in the railway stations of Europe, or the reality of refugees scratching out a meagre existence in camps or makeshift homes in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

More than 160 leaders have shown up in New York this week to mark the enduring importance of the United Nations over the past 70 years.

Yet we do so against the backdrop of the worst refugee crisis since World War II.

Every one of us sees the harrowing images daily.

At the same time we see the consequences of the Security Council's failure to act over the past four years.

It is time for the Council to step up.

It's time for it to stop talking about what's right and do what's right.

It's time for the Council to do the job for which it was created.

It's time for its members to set aside their vested interests and historical alliances in order to stop the violence and end the suffering.

It's time for the Council to do its duty for those who have lost their lives and loved ones, and for the millions who have been displaced.

We cannot afford to let the Council go from an institution with failings to a failed institution.

There must be a political solution to the conflict in Syria. And it must come soon.

It should address all issues and involve all relevant actors, from within the region and beyond.

The question is not Assad or ISIL. Both need to be dealt with.

A workable political solution will not be a perfect one.

Indeed this is a classic case of the perfect being the enemy of the good.

It will require international cooperation and compromise – on all sides.

Mr President,

The Council also needs to engage in making progress on the Middle East Peace Process.

Since being elected to the Council New Zealand has made clear its view that the status quo is unsustainable.

It puts at risk the achievement of the two State solution that we all know is the best hope for a lasting peace.

This is a matter of urgency and another critical issue on which the Security Council should lead.

We are told that "the conditions are not right on the ground."
"The parties are not ready."

But we should not let conditions on the ground dictate our actions, if our actions can help progress a solution.

Mr President.

We stood for the Council because we believe small states have a positive contribution to make and we want to provide a voice for those who go unheard too often.

It was for this latter reason that we arranged the first open debate on the peace and security challenges of Small Island Developing States during our Presidency in July.

We were heartened by the level of participation – both by those States and the wider membership.

The challenge for a small elected member to have its voice heard and its views taken into account is considerable.

Part of the problem is structural.

That the five Permanent Members of the Council have the veto creates an extraordinary power imbalance.

That imbalance is exacerbated by their practices of pre-negotiating outcomes before engaging with the 10 elected members.

And of taking no action when one of the five does not agree.

This experience has reaffirmed to us that New Zealand was right to oppose the veto when the Charter was being negotiated.

It is still our view that the veto is a constraint on the effectiveness of the Council and realising the aspirations of the United Nations' members.

For that reason, New Zealand supports the two proposals being put forward this year – by the A.C.T. Group of countries and by France and Mexico – to limit the use of the veto in mass atrocity situations.

The fact that two Permanent Members are supportive is progress.

But part of the problem is also behavioural.

The Permanent Members have become used to exercising power and are protective of their privileged position.

They presume to control the Council's agenda and to determine its processes.

Despite this, we are doing what we can to ensure that the elected members have the information and the opportunity to contribute effectively to Council decision-making.

And, in turn, that it makes effective decisions.

We want to contribute to a Council that is genuinely focused on finding practical solutions to political problems and not on preserving the status quo.

We are well aware that the conflicts on the Council's agenda are complex and not easily solved, but we are realistic in our expectations of what can be achieved.

New Zealand believes that the body responsible for maintaining international peace and security has a responsibility to find solutions to the world's most pressing crises.

Mr President.

Only the United Nations and its agencies have the capacity to focus world attention across a range of issues.

This was demonstrated last week with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We sincerely hope that it will be repeated in Paris in December with the adoption of a meaningful agreement on climate change.

Mr President,

Healthy and productive oceans are a key requirement for a sustainable future.

I was pleased to announce earlier this week the creation a marine sanctuary around New Zealand's Kermadec Islands.

The Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary will comprise 620,000 square kilometres of ocean in one of the most pristine and special environments on Earth.

The Sanctuary will be one of the world's largest and most significant fully-protected marine areas.

It will cover an area twice the size of our landmass and better protect the habitats of a huge array of sea creatures.

New Zealand is committed to managing our oceans responsibly and we are working with our Pacific neighbours to do the same.

We have committed a billion dollars in development assistance to the Pacific, focused on among other things, helping support sustainable fisheries management.

Our aid is focused on our region and in areas where we know we can get real results for real people, improving livelihoods and creating opportunities.

Many governments around the world are doing the same and we are proud to play our part.

Mr President.

As I prepare to leave New York, I do so proud of the contribution that New Zealand has made to the sustainable development of our oceans.

I leave proud of the contribution New Zealand is making on the Security Council.

And proud of the values and principles that underpin the country I lead.

I also leave dispirited by the Security Council's failure to help not only the people of Syria but those in so many other countries.

The collective effort of the Security Council, supported by the wider membership, could make a real difference.

I think all of us who have been here over the past week know that collective action must start somewhere.

Mr President it should start here.
