

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S  
ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
New York, September 23, 2008**

A Call to Global Leadership

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome to the opening of the general debate of the 63rd session of the General Assembly.

It is customary for the Secretary-General, on this occasion, to assess the state of the world and to present our vision for the coming year. We all recognize the perils of our current passage. We face a global financial crisis. A global energy crisis. A global food crisis. Trade talks have collapsed, yet again. We have seen new outbreaks of war and violence, new rhetoric of confrontation. Climate change ever more clearly threatens our planet.

We often say that global problems demand global solutions. And yet .... Today, we also face a crisis of a different sort. Like these others, it knows no borders. It affects all nations. It complicates all other problems. I refer, here, to a challenge of global leadership.

Excellencies,

We are on the eve of a great transition. Our world has changed, more than we may realize. We see new centers of power and leadership - in Asia, Latin America and across the newly developed world. The problems we face have grown much, much more complex. In this new world, our challenges are increasingly those of collaboration rather than confrontation. Nations can no longer protect their interests, or advance the well-being of their people, without the partnership of the rest.

Yet I worry. There is, today, a danger of losing sight of this new reality. I see a danger of nations looking more inward, rather than toward a shared future. I see a danger of retreating from the progress we have made, particularly in the realm of development and more equitably sharing the fruits of global growth. This is tragic. For at this time one thing is clear. We must do more, not less.

We must do more to help our fellow human beings weather the gathering storm. Yes, global growth has raised billions of people out of poverty. However, if you are among the world's poor, you have never felt poverty so sharply. Yes, international law and justice have never been so widely embraced as on this 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

However, those living in nations where human rights are abused have never been so vulnerable.

Yes, most of us live in peace and security. However, we see deepening violence in many nations that can least afford it. Afghanistan. Somalia. The Democratic Republic of the Congo. Iraq. Sudan. To name just a few.

This is not right. This is not just.

We can do something about it. And with strong global leadership, we will.

Distinguished delegates,

Let me speak about the three pillars of our work: human rights, peace and security, development. To put it bluntly, we face a development emergency. Over the past year, we watched with alarm as the price of fuel, food and commodities rose sharply. Wealthy countries worry about recession, while the poorest of the poor can no longer afford to eat.

That is why, two days from now, we will hold a High-Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals. We must galvanize global awareness and global action, with a special focus on Africa. As you know, progress has been uneven. Pledges have not been fully honoured. Yet we have achieved enough to know the goals are within reach. At this High-Level Event, I will bring together a new coalition to meet this challenge - governments, NGOs, CEOs, faith groups and philanthropists. We know this approach will work. It already has with malaria - a disease that kills a child every 30 seconds.

Since last year, I brought together a pioneering public-private partnership, with an agreed science-based strategy, funding and unified global management. On Thursday, I will announce new research showing it to be a striking success. We are nearing a time when we will eliminate deaths from malaria as one of the last great scourges of humankind. And now we will apply this new model of global partnership to other MDGs. I will ask you to be bold and specific.

I will ask you to say what you will do, and how you will do it - to help us get on track for success by 2015. And I call for us to follow up these new commitments at a formal summit on the MDGs, to be held in 2010. Let us renew our leadership, starting here today. Let this call to action be heard, far and wide. The world's poor deserve no less.

Distinguished delegates,

The United Nations is the champion of the most vulnerable. When disaster strikes, we act. We did so this year in Haiti and in other Caribbean nations hit by hurricanes. We did so in Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis. There, the challenge now is to push for political progress, including credible steps on human rights and democracy. We did so in Southeast Asia affected by severe flooding, and in the Horn of Africa afflicted by drought, where 17 million people need emergency help. Since taking office, I have called for more strenuous action in Somalia. Must we wait - and see more children die in the sand? We at the United Nations are leaders. We at the United Nations are duty-bound to do what compassion and human decency demand of us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The global food crisis has not gone away. It may have faded from the daily headlines. But note this fact: last year at this time, rice cost \$330 a ton. Today it is \$730. In a single year, the food staple that feeds half of the population more than doubled in price. People who used to buy rice by the bag now do so by the handful. Those who ate two meals a day now get by on one.

The United Nations has led the world's response. Our UN High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis set forth solutions. We focused on getting seeds and fertilizers into the hands of small farmers. We aim to create a new "green revolution" in Africa. But the truth is, we lack new resources. The international community has not matched words with deeds.

Excellencies,

We are well-aware of the many challenges to peace and security around the world. In nations such as Burundi and Sierra Leone, Liberia and Timor Leste, more than 100,000 UN peacekeepers are helping people turn from conflict to peace. We should never underestimate the power of the UN's good offices, particularly in preventive diplomacy. We see the fruits in Nepal, Kenya and, we can hope, Zimbabwe. In Cyprus, there is a real chance to reunify this long-divided island. In Georgia, the UN can help bridge the tensions resulting from the recent conflict. In Côte d'Ivoire, we will help organize elections before year's end - a major stride toward recovery and democracy. In Darfur, we face a continuing challenge in meeting deployment deadlines. We still lack critical assets and personnel.

I would not be doing my job if I did not point out how dangerous it is to pretend that the United Nations can solve today's complex problems without the full backing of Member States. If not matched by resources, mandates are empty.

Ladies and gentlemen:

The global financial crisis endangers all our work - financing for development, social spending in rich nations and poor, the Millennium Development Goals.

If ever there were a call to collective action - a call for global leadership - it is now. At the Doha Review Conference, later this year, we have an opportunity to address the critical issues of international economic cooperation and development. I urge all Members to engage, at the highest levels. We need to restore order to the international financial markets. We need a new understanding on business ethics and governance, with more compassion and less uncritical faith in the "magic" of markets. And we must think about how the world economic system should evolve to more fully reflect the changing realities of our time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Other issues demand global leadership. I am thinking, here, of combating malaria and AIDS, and of reducing maternal and child mortality. I am thinking of global terrorism, and the enduring importance of disarmament and non-proliferation. I note the progress in the 6-party talks on the Korean Peninsula and urge that all agreements be implemented. And I call again on Iran to comply with Security Council resolutions and cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Above all, I am thinking of human rights. It is essential to act upon the principle that justice is a pillar of peace, security and development. We must advance the Responsibility to Protect. We recognize that such issues are seldom black and white. We accept that politics can be complex and full of trade-offs. Yet we cannot let crimes against humanity go unpunished. We have it in our power to combat impunity. And therefore we must.

Finally, I am thinking of the defining issue of our era - climate change. Last December, in Bali, world leaders agreed on a road-map toward 2012, which is as far as the Kyoto Protocol takes us. We must regain our momentum. Our first test comes three months from now in Poznan, Poland. By then we need a shared vision of what a global climate change agreement might look like. We have only 14 months until Copenhagen. I urge the governments of Poland and Denmark, and all UN Member States, to demonstrate their leadership - their global leadership - on this truly existential issue.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, let me briefly return to the theme of my address to you last year - a stronger United Nations for a better world. The foundation of all our work is accountability. The UN Secretariat, including myself, is accountable to you, the Member States. And that is why I push so hard, so strongly for UN reform.

We need to change the UN culture. We need to become faster, more flexible and more effective - more modern. In the coming weeks, I will ask you, the Member States, to support my proposals for a new human resources framework. We need to replace our current system of contracts and conditions of service. It is dysfunctional. It is demoralizing. It discourages mobility between UN departments and the field. It promotes stagnation, rather than creativity. It undercuts our most precious resource - the global, dedicated corps of international civil servants that is the backbone of the United Nations.

Whenever I travel, I go out of my way to meet these brave and committed men and women. They work in the most difficult circumstances, often at great personal sacrifice. I cannot fully express my admiration for them. The time has come to invest more in our staff. And that is why I am promoting mobility, matched with proper career training, as a way to create new professional opportunities ? to inject new flexibility and dynamism into the Organization.

Finally, Distinguished delegates, let us also remember:

You, the Member States, are accountable to each other and to the Organization, as well. You cannot continue to pass resolutions mandating ambitious peace operations without the necessary troops, money and materiel. We cannot send our brave UN staff around the world - 25 of whom died this year - without doing all we can to assure their security. We cannot reform this vital Organization without providing the required resources.

Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen:

It takes leadership to honour our pledges and our promises in the face of fiscal constraints and political opposition. It takes leadership to commit our soldiers to a cause of peace in faraway places. It takes leadership to speak out for justice; To act on climate change despite powerful voices against your leadership; To stand against protectionism and make trade concessions, even in our enlightened self-interest. Yet - that is why we are here.

We have before us a great opportunity. We have ample reason to be optimistic. Today's uncertainties will pass. The challenges before us are our creation. Therefore we can solve them, together. By acting wisely and responsibly, we will set the stage for a new era of global prosperity, more widely and equitably shared.

I count on your leadership.

Thank you very much for your attention.