

Address by H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the United Nations General Assembly, to the 56th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, *Human Security and Dignity: Fulfilling the Promise of the United Nations* Monday, 8 September 2003, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Deputy Secretary-General Frechette,
President Cardoso,
Under-Secretary-General Tharoor,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address the fifty-sixth Annual DPI/NGO Conference on the theme “Human Security and Dignity: Fulfilling the Promise of the United Nations”. I am particularly pleased to offer my support to you both as the current President of the General Assembly, but also as a long-time supporter of civil society organizations. I have long been convinced of the great usefulness and relevance of your invaluable work in the national and international arena.

This important Conference, the premier non-governmental organization (NGO) event at the United Nations, provides an excellent forum for civil society and the United Nations, as the theme of the Conference implies, to highlight the link between human security and living in dignity, through which the promise of the United Nations will be realized.

I have been involved for many years in the work of NGOs in my own country, the Czech Republic, as well as internationally, and I know through personal experience that human security can only be achieved by building on people’s strengths to create strong civil societies and institutions.

Non-governmental organizations have participated in the work of the United Nations almost from its inception. Civil society participation has expanded dramatically during the cycle of UN global conferences of the 1990s.

Thousands of non-governmental organizations now have formal consultative status at the United Nations, and their number is growing. Partnership in the humanitarian and development areas has long been established, and participation by NGOs has enriched the formal debates and influenced the outcome of many intergovernmental deliberations.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, more than 3,500 NGOs were accredited, and businesses were key players in the partnership programmes that were a major component of the Summit outcome. General Assembly special sessions have also been addressed by NGO speakers, and some countries have included civil society representatives in their Assembly delegations. Many UN treaty bodies now routinely

consider reports from NGOs, alongside official reports from governments. At the level of field operations, partnership between the UN system and NGOs in humanitarian and development missions has been the rule for decades, with NGOs commonly participating in UN country-level planning processes.

I fully support the Secretary-General's initiative in forming the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations, and would like to take this opportunity to welcome to this Conference its Chairman President Cardoso. This Panel is charged with the important task of reviewing the relationship between the United Nations and civil society and offer practical recommendations for improved modalities of interaction.

I believe strongly in the value of active NGO and civil society participation in the work of the United Nations and increased dialogue between governmental and NGO entities. I am aware of the importance and continuous nature of the process to draw the attention of civil society to the work of the United Nations and to encourage them to participate in it. I know from my personal experience both in the NGOs, as well as in the government, that to obtain durable positive results one has to work rigorously and perseveringly.

Fortunately, your efforts are bringing together those, who still believe in the noble goals of the United Nations. The discussion on how we work together towards a more effective and mutually supportive relationship to enhance our membership is more relevant than ever.

Only a few years ago, when the world leaders met in New York during the Millennium Summit, they expressed their firm commitment to the work of the United Nations. The partnership was discussed there and the Member States resolved to give greater opportunities to the non-governmental organizations and civil society to contribute to the realization of the Organization's goals and programmes. The Millennium Summit ended with the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals for the next decade and beyond.

I am deeply convinced that successful and timely implementation of the Millennium Development Goals will be not only a great UN contribution to the struggle against extreme poverty, and for the struggle for the provision of basic human needs from drinking water and basic health, to education and employment, but at the same time it will target some of the main causes of tensions and armed conflicts, as well as intolerance and terrorism. If we are successful, the world will be that much safer, saner and peaceful. The aim is to create conditions enabling all people to live in dignity and safety, free of hunger, fear or oppression.

The United Nations has a vast array of functions to implement its mandates. Its wide range of various bodies and activities are vital and still indispensable. The United Nations is needed, as the only legitimate forum to resolve problems that are transnational in scope and, therefore, cannot be solved by individual States; some examples -- global

warming, environmental degradation, the fight against diseases such as SARS and HIV/AIDS, drug-trafficking, humanitarian crises, transnational crime, terrorism and armed conflict.

Recognizing the important supporting role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict, and building on the success of adoption by this session of the General Assembly of the resolution on the prevention of armed conflict, I convened an open meeting last week to explore how best to link the work of civil society in preventing armed conflict with the work of governments and the UN in this arena. This initiative is intended to support efforts for the prevention of armed conflict and to pursue practices that foster a climate of peace, help prevent or mitigate crisis situations and contribute to reconciliation. These are very concrete tasks specified and agreed upon consensually during our discussion in the General Assembly which led in July to the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on the prevention of armed conflict.

The global community needs, more than ever before, to work together intensively and courageously, in order to build a more secure and rule-based world, in which human freedom and life in dignity, as well as private enterprise, can flourish. It is generally acknowledged that the global community has become interdependent, be it for trade and investments, in the area of employment, or for solving the problems related to climate change, or eradicating poverty and terrorism. The quality of the international order, the good will and responsibility of all the nations, particularly the most powerful ones, are essential. We all have to work together to transfer global insecurity into global responsibility.

In conclusion, let me express my gratitude for your untiring work and support of the United Nations. I firmly believe that your deliberations will continue to contribute to ensure the goal of a much more humane world for our children and the generations to come.