



IRELAND

Statement by

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Mr. President,

Let me begin by warmly congratulating you on your election. You have my very best wishes for a successful term in office.

Distinguished delegates,

This is my first opportunity to address the General Assembly as Ireland's Foreign Minister. It is a great honour and privilege to do so.

Ireland believes strongly in the purposes, principles and potential of the United Nations. Formed in the shadow of global war, the United Nations embodies the idea of our common humanity. We have a shared interest as well as a moral obligation to act on that common humanity in the world.

In this new century, when we speak of the 'international community', it cannot be as a vague platitude or as a faceless scapegoat.

Global challenges confront us - climate change, economic turbulence, food and energy prices, HIV/AIDS and terrorism among them.

We can either be an international community passively divided and at the mercy of these forces, or we can be a community in the true sense - of active participants united by our sense of mutual solidarity, our common sense of justice, our common desire for a better and peaceful future and a shared commitment to international law and to the human rights of all.

The United Nations is the indispensable framework for realising the potential of that community, as it has shown again and again. Ireland is proud to have played its distinctive part in that history and we are absolutely committed to playing a full part in its future.

And let us be clear, the challenges we face have intensified in the past year.

Over the past period, we have witnessed the potential fall-out from the financial crisis for all countries, and not least of course, for the developing countries. The depth of their

concerns has been heard from this podium. We have all failed, as yet, to reach agreement on a balanced world trade deal.

Rising fuel and food prices have exacted a particular toll on the world's most vulnerable and poor.

The effects of climate change, likewise, are placing a disproportionate burden on those least equipped to cope.

More than half-way towards the 2015 target date for the Millennium Development Goals, and despite significant progress in some areas, we have not made enough headway towards meeting them.

The United Nations must continue to take the lead in this effort, while each of us, as political leaders, must recognise our duty to take effective action in support of goals that are only increasing in relevance and urgency.

UN Reform

The world needs a strong and effective United Nations.

That is why, as a committed Member State, Ireland has long supported efforts to reform and improve its operation. I very much welcome and appreciate the priority that Secretary General Ban has attached to this task.

As he said when he took up office, "the true measure of the success of the United Nations is not how much we promise, but how much we deliver for those who need us most".

Every Member State must play its part in ensuring that it can fulfil its role. Ireland is, therefore, proud of the contribution it has made to the reform process.

Most recently, we were pleased to work closely with our good friends and colleagues, Tanzania, in facilitating consultations on greater System-wide Coherence in the United Nations, a vitally important part of the reform agenda.

I would like to take the opportunity to express my deep appreciation of the constructive spirit in which Member States and UN agencies and staff approached the consultation process, chaired by Ambassadors Kavanagh and Mahiga. Their report was welcomed in the consensus resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 15 September.

A lot, of course, remains to be done. We should not shy away from issues just because they are difficult to tackle.

Peace and Security

Taking forward the reform agenda does not of course mean losing sight of the real strengths and achievements of the United Nations, especially in peace-keeping.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first occasion on which personnel of the Irish Defence Forces wore the blue beret. In the five decades since, they have worn it with pride and distinction.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer them, and those with whom they have served, my deepest personal gratitude.

Of course, as the world continues to evolve, so will our approach to peace-keeping. Regional organisations, such as the European Union, can - and should - be expected to play an increasingly prominent role in undertaking Security Council-mandated operations. I am particularly pleased that one such mission, EUFOR in Chad, is under the very effective leadership of an Irish man, Lieutenant General Pat Nash.

Conflict Resolution

Last year my predecessor expressed the hope that, after almost forty years, it would no longer be necessary for Irish Ministers to brief this Assembly on the search for peace on the island of Ireland.

I am pleased to confirm that the task we now confront in Ireland is no longer building peace, but securing and underpinning it for the generations to come.

Our history has, however, made us particularly conscious of the huge human cost of conflict, and the moral obligation we carry to prevent and to resolve it. We in Ireland owe a debt of gratitude to all in the international community who lent their support to our search for peace. In that search, we were genuinely part of a community - concentric circles of other nations and international actors who provided goodwill and momentum, moral support, concrete assistance, independent mediation and facilitation when needed. Anchoring the process was a central partnership between the British and Irish Governments. So we know the good that can be done, and we now feel a special duty to try and repay some of that debt in kind.

That is why my Government has established a Conflict Resolution Unit, within my Ministry, as a channel through which we can make our contribution. Its aim is to complement the work of others, especially that of the United Nations. It will, in part, draw on the lessons we have learned from our own experiences.

As part of this work, Nuala O'Loan, formerly the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland – who played a significant personal role in building confidence in the new policing arrangements there - is now serving as our Special Envoy to Timor Leste.

Disarmament

Ireland's commitment to peace-keeping, peace-building and conflict resolution extends to removing not only the causes of conflict, but also the means. Creating a secure and stable world demands effective arms control and disarmament, and the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Ireland was very proud last May to host the Diplomatic Conference that delivered the 'Cluster Munitions Convention' – an historic agreement to ban the production and use of these pernicious instruments of war.

The Convention is strong and ambitious.

Each state party undertakes never, in any circumstances, to use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer cluster munitions, or to assist any other party in doing so. It is comprehensive and it provides for no exceptions.

It sets new standards for assistance to victims and also, importantly, for clearing affected areas.

I would, once again, like to express the deep appreciation of my Government for the constructive approach taken by Member States. Without it, such a significant step forward could not have been taken.

The Convention will open for signature in Oslo in December, and Ireland will be among the first signatories. I strongly urge all Governments to do likewise.

Human Rights

Peace and security must be accompanied by a firm commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights. This remains at the very core of the United Nations' mandate.

In this, the 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration, we must act with renewed determination to make its promises a living reality for all of our people.

This means improving the United Nations' capacity to tackle abuses effectively, whenever and wherever they arise, ensuring a strong and vigilant Human Rights Council.

This is also the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court. It has already carved out a vital role for itself in bringing an end to impunity, and in demanding that the rule of law be upheld. Ireland remains strongly supportive of the ICC and its mandate, and urges all Member States to cooperate fully with its work.

Development

Mr President,

Eradicating world hunger and ending poverty is one of the most urgent tasks we face. Realising the vision of the Millennium Goals is a great challenge, but it can be met.

I am very proud that Ireland is now the sixth largest aid donor in the world in terms of GNP percentage. It is, I believe, a reflection of our values of solidarity and respect for human dignity.

As a committed Member State, I am also gratified that the European Union and its member States continue to be the world's leading donor, accounting for some sixty per cent of the world's official development assistance.

In support of our efforts to secure the Millennium Goals, Ireland established a Hunger Task Force to determine the most effective contribution we can make to tackling the root causes of hunger, particularly in Africa. Comprising 15 renowned international experts, its report was launched by our Prime Minister, Taoiseach Brian Cowen, last week with the participation of the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. The Report has highlighted three particular areas for focus.

First, we need to improve small-holder productivity in Africa. The agricultural sector has been neglected for too long. *Secondly*, we need increased focus on maternal and infant under-nutrition. A bad start makes life an uphill struggle from day one. *Thirdly*, the report states clearly that we do not need new commitments, but rather the delivery on the ones we have already entered into.

These important messages will guide our work in the period ahead.

Distinguished delegates,

Middle East

Let me turn now to the situation in the Middle East.

The first Irish peace-keepers fifty years ago were deployed to serve with the UN mission in Lebanon.

It is, therefore, a particular source of sadness to me that, despite the great efforts that have been made down the years, we do not yet have lasting peace in the Middle East, especially between the Palestinian people and Israel.

I commend the efforts of all of those who are prepared to take the political risks necessary to turn this situation around. In particular, I welcome and support the dialogue that President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have engaged in under the auspices of the Annapolis process. I hope that what they have achieved together in their talks can be built upon in the immediate period ahead, and that it will result in what we all wish to see – a just agreement, a lasting peace, and a more prosperous future for their people.

Improving conditions on the ground in the Palestinian Territories, including very importantly the economic and social situation, would, I believe, make a significant and critical contribution to creating the right context for talks to succeed. I have, in this regard, called many times for an end to the construction of illegal settlements, not only because it is right to do so, but because it would also send a strong and welcome signal of good faith at a difficult and uncertain time. Israel needs urgently to listen to the voice – the concerned voice – of the international community on the settlement issue.

Sudan/Darfur

The situation in Sudan, and the tragic suffering of the people of Darfur, urgently demands our attention.

I strongly urge the Sudanese Government and the rebel groups to return to the negotiating table and to engage seriously with Special Representative Ambassador Bassolé. UNAMID must be allowed to deploy, fully and speedily, and a secure environment must be created to allow the humanitarian community to carry out its important work.

A culture of impunity cannot prevail. Those responsible for human rights abuses in Darfur must be brought to justice. The Government in Khartoum must face up to its responsibilities to protect its citizens, to provide security and to ensure justice is done.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the recent agreement to form a power-sharing government is a moment of opportunity that must be seized. The people of Zimbabwe, who have suffered for far too long, deserve a new beginning and look to their leaders to provide it. Their leaders must not be found wanting.

I look forward to the delivery of genuine power-sharing, of real political and economic reform and of the creation of a more open and free society.

Burma/Myanmar

In Burma, we continue to stand with the people in their demand for greater democracy and human rights, and we renew in particular our call for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and her fellow political prisoners.

It is gravely disappointing that the ruling military junta has not engaged seriously with the Good Offices Mission of the Secretary General, nor responded in any meaningful way to the concerns of the international community. International pressure must be maintained on Burma's leaders, including and in particular by the countries of the region.

Georgia

Ireland has watched with great distress the recent conflict in Georgia, including the evidence of the use of cluster munitions against civilian populations.

We warmly applaud President Sarkozy and the French Presidency of the European Union for their efforts to secure a settlement. The EU is deploying a monitoring mission to Georgia, to work alongside United Nations observers, to which Ireland is proud to be contributing.

We now need to see the full honouring of commitments entered into, including the full withdrawal of military forces by early October. I also urge Russia and Georgia to engage constructively and in good faith in the discussions scheduled to begin in Geneva on 15 October.

Conclusion

In closing, Mr President, I would like to return to where I began today.

As Ireland's Foreign Minister, I come here to reaffirm our strong attachment and loyalty to the United Nations.

Whether we wish it or not, we are being united every day, more and more, by the common challenges we all face. The principles and the work of the United Nations have never been needed more. Its principles give us a firm foundation. Continuing reform will give us even stronger tools. What remains to be proven is our collective will to use them.

The vision of all our peoples, of a peaceful and secure world, with justice, human rights and dignity for all, can be realised only in cooperation with others of like mind. For Ireland's part, we are determined not to be a passive member of this formal community of nations.

With the support and the help of others, the foundations of a future of peace have, as I have reported, been laid on the island of Ireland. We are now determined to honour that debt, and continue a long tradition of active engagement in the world by contributing our energy and our initiative where we can make a difference.

It is only by such a commitment, by each of us and through this body, that we can make this international community more than the sum of its parts, more than the sum of its fears, and instead make it what it was meant to be when the United Nations was established - the sum of all our hopes.

Thank you.