

Speech of the President of the Government of Spain during the general debate of the 63rd period of sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations

New York, 25 September 2008

25/09/2008

Mr. President,

In a few weeks' time we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And we are also trying to implement the strategies to achieve the Millennium Goals.

The Universal Declaration is the result of the firm willingness of our parents to leave a better world for their children. For they suffered, they fought and they defeated totalitarisms; and they summarised their yearning for freedom and prosperity in that text.

The Millennium Goals also reflect the firm willingness of our generation to fight extreme poverty and to leave our children a world free from hunger and deprivation, which make millions of human beings suffer every day.

These two aims, the respect for Human Rights and the achievement of the Millennium Goals are perhaps the noblest ones, the ones that reflect a greater engagement with the dignity of human beings in the history of mankind.

And it is considering this, that we can say that in spite of everything, in spite of all the suffering that humans have deliberately caused over the last decades, we have learnt, we have moved on.

Therefore, we can feel satisfied for we have defined and spread the horizons of mankind. We can feel satisfied but not in the least self-complacent.

And the reason why there is no room for self-complacency is that if we consider either the Millennium Goals or the Declaration of Human Rights, we can only draw one conclusion: the results obtained are far from meeting our desires, precisely because our urge is as strong as it was in the past and it becomes even stronger as time goes by.

Ten years ago, when we were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Declaration, President Nelson Mandela said that poverty "is an offence" against this Declaration, for it is "not the result of the forces of nature", but the result "of the actions and omissions of those who occupy leading positions in politics, economy and other spheres of human activity".

Being aware of this responsibility, eight years ago, we undertook to make an effort, which has been unique from a historical perspective, in order to make up for extreme poverty, which affects millions of people all over the world.

I would like to say that, in my opinion, we have not progressed as much as we should have progressed; we have not progressed as much as we intended to in the first place. We have gone wrong at some point.

Yet, this question is as urgent as it was when the Millennium Goals were established, or even more.

Mr. President,

In order to attain the Millennium Goals by 2015 we must keep moving on. We cannot use the situation of the international markets as an excuse to elude our duties. We cannot shield behind circumstances in order to escape our compromises.

It is not just a matter of moral imperatives, although these moral imperatives cannot be postponed any longer. It is a matter of taking responsible action in favour of international stability and balance.

Building a new international financial order to prevent situations such as the one we are living is an urging need; as well as fighting hunger and extreme poverty. For hunger and extreme poverty are affecting millions of human beings, and this is unacceptable, for they are a constant source of conflicts and pressures that give way to migratory flows, and it is difficult to control these situations.

I am talking on behalf of a country that is making considerable efforts towards solidarity in the area of cooperation policies. Over the last four years, Spain has been the State that has implemented a greater increase of its Official Aid for Development, and we intend to reach 0.7% of our Gross National Product by 2012. This is the main aim of the Spanish society, as a whole, and this compromise goes in parallel with the duty to face the food crisis.

My country believes that the best way to corroborate the validity of the Declaration of Human Rights, keeping 2015 as a vital reference, is stressing the historical relevance of both ephemerides, which are aimed at turning human dignity into a wall against arbitrariness and despotism and also into a containing wall against hunger, deprivation and extreme poverty.

A few weeks ago I made a proposal on behalf of the Government of Spain and I would like to put it forward here again: I would like to achieve a universal deferment of death penalty by 2005, before achieving its abolition. I hereby ask the representatives of the different countries that still apply the death penalty to support this measure and to take part into a reflection process on the meaning of this penalty.

The spread and universal recognition of human rights and the eradication of extreme poverty may seem a utopia when considered from the point of view of the life span of a single generation. But they are not a utopia anymore; they shouldn't be a utopia anymore. Utopias are premature truths more often than not. Let's not hold them back, let's not postpone them, shielding behind resignation or clumsy selfishness. Because, if we only followed these utopias, we would be working for a fair, safe, supportive international order, which is what we all want.

Mr. President,

The international financial crisis that started one year ago has already had an impact on most developed economies. And also on less developed ones, for it can affect the Millennium Goals: this might increase the suffering of the poorest countries due to the bad practices implemented by rich countries.

Because, this crisis has come to prove the need to reconsider those economic spaces that are immune to public regulation and supervision.

We already know where speculative greed can lead in a context of deregulation. Today more than ever, it is necessary to emphasise the vital role of institutions, the role of public institutions as a rationalising element in our markets, the instrumental character of markets, which should serve the real needs of families, welfare, education, health and social cohesion.

The State protects markets from their own excesses, thus, in the world of global markets it would be necessary to create institutions with a capacity to exert control and to supervise those markets.

We need an in-depth revision of the rules and institutions of international economy. We need a shared vision about the establishment of a new international financial legality.

We must learn from our mistakes and we must do it soon. With a cooperative spirit.

My Government intends to contribute actively to the construction of this new international order. We will promote and buttress an agreement containing tangible compromises to implement supervision, transparency and quick alert in national institutions; an agreement to guarantee the agile creation of those institutions in order to provide markets facing situations of scarcity with liquidity and anti-cyclic reserves; and an agreement to strengthen the role of international financial organisms.

Mr. President,

The prosperity of our nations will only be possible if international peace and safety are guaranteed. And peace and safety will only be possible through an efficient multilateralism based

upon respect and upon the defence of international legality. For my country there is no other way to understand the international order.

Four years ago I proposed this very Assembly to consolidate the Alliance of Civilisations in order to bring the different cultures together and in order to tear down the walls of incomprehension. Today, I can see with satisfaction that this initiative, promoted by Spain and Turkey, has been fully adopted by the United Nations and it is supported by a Group of Friends formed by ninety States and international organisations.

Peace will only be possible the day dialogue and understanding about common values, values involving respect for tolerance, defeat intolerance and fundamentalism.

Spain will keep on defending this belief in the different scenarios in which our contribution is or may be relevant. In the United Nations and with the United Nations in the first place.

We will do so not only because this is the best way to implement the desires of most Spanish citizens, but also because this is the way we want to assume our responsibilities within a fair, safe, supportive international order; an order in which we believe.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

No one can deny the capacity of humans to progress. Our urge to discover, to innovate, to go beyond opens the door to new solutions for our needs everyday in different areas. We must place this immense creative strength at the service of the values upon which the dignity of human beings is based, doing away with arbitrariness, injustice and discrimination.

We can't stop now, we can't surrender.

From the United Nations we can encourage a period of international prosperity and cohesion, with a rational attitude and with the illusion of our shared values.

It is for this reason that we need consensus, not unilateralism.

We need sustainable development, not uncontrolled development.

We need permanent political dialogue and we must avoid the temptation to go back to an obsolete cold war.

We need to eradicate extreme poverty and to denounce the selfishness of the rich.

We need the United Nations.

We need all those men and women who know that their dignity depends on the dignity of their fellow-beings.

For hundreds of millions need us in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This must be the main aim of our project.

Spain feels engaged with this and we will meet our compromises.

Thank you very much.