



STATEMENT BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN NEW YORK

CHAIR OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS  
ON THE QUESTION OF EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION AND INCREASE IN THE  
MEMBERSHIP OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL AND OTHER MATTERS RELATED TO  
THE COUNCIL

AT AN INFORMAL PLENARY SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

19 FEBRUARY 2009

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

1. “The Untied Nations” – that is how the name of the newborn organization was spelled in one of the San Francisco documents. Accidentally misspelled, for the objective of the UN was exactly the opposite of untying nations. The world body was brought into the world in 1945 to strengthen the mutual ties between countries and to tie their behavior to international law. In order to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, the UN Charter endowed in particular the Security Council with sweeping powers. Yet it is said that its real impact derives not just from such legal provisions but to a large extent also from its perceived legitimacy. Let me quote for example Harvard professor Joseph Nye, who said: “What the UN can convey that is particularly important is legitimacy, an important part of soft power.” End of quote. For the UN Security Council, remaining relevant therefore requires retaining legitimacy. Yet it is here that we have a lot of work on our hands. Just look at the UN logo. It was approved back in 1946 and depicts the world surrounded by olive branches – by now, that world has changed so profoundly, that the profoundly unchanged organization’s ability to bear the olive branch of peace is severely at risk. Peace and security cannot be maintained by a Security Council that is out of date and out of touch. A young and charismatic American president led the way when he said, and I quote: “The United Nations cannot survive as a static organization. Its obligations are increasing as well as its size. Its Charter must be changed as well as its customs. The authors of that Charter did not intend that it be frozen in perpetuity.” End of quote. That was John F. Kennedy at the opening of the 18<sup>th</sup> GA session in 1963, the last and only time the Council’s composition was updated. Now we are in GA session number 63 and once more face the responsibility to reform.
2. This chance for change has been three decades in the making. It was India together with Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Guyana, Maldives, Nepal, Nigeria and Sri Lanka that in 1979 planted the seed by asking the General Assembly to include a new item on its agenda: “Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters”. It was September 11 and its aftermath that laid bare the urgent need to adapt the Security Council to the come-back of international insecurity, propelling the item towards the top of the UN’s agenda. At the 2005 World Summit, our leaders rallied behind the objective of, and I quote, “early reform of the Security Council – an essential element of our overall effort to reform the United Nations – in order to make it more broadly representative, efficient and transparent and thus to further enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and implementation of its decisions,” end of quote. Our leaders thus already spelled out what the objective of Security Council reform is. What they did not tell us, of course, was their definition of “early reform”. However, as the President of the General Assembly has asserted, it would seem safe to say, that they did not mean to see another World Summit pass us by with the status quo intact. There is no reason why we should fail them, for today we at long last leave the antechamber of reform and walk into the negotiation room. Landmark Decision

62/557 opened that door on 15 September 2008. On this historic day, we should be thankful to all who worked hard to create this opportunity and, at the same time, we should be mindful of the responsibility not to squander it. Outside the negotiation room, the world finds itself in a state of flux. With the economic dominoes falling, some even augur a new Great Depression. And as we all know, that crisis set the stage for a war that brought untold sorrow to mankind – a history the UN is supposed to stop us from repeating. In these dangerous days, we cannot stop at repairing our economic institutions, our system of collective security must be reformed along with it. We don't have the luxury of leaving one of the two for another day. Coming from where I come from, I know first-hand how intimately peace and prosperity are related and that both deserve first-tier priority. Coming from where I come from, I know how crucial the Council's work is to peace on Earth, to peace on the ground. Security Council reform forms a centerpiece of today's Herculean effort to reshape global governance.

3. Fortunately, as the last couple of months have also shown, the fire in which Decision 62/557 was forged still burns. We must keep that fire of collective commitment going, because if we let narrow self-interest prevail, we might miss the narrow opportunity for decisive progress. While the onus is mostly on Member States, the President of the General Assembly and I, as Chair of the Intergovernmental Negotiations on his behalf, will do everything in our power to prevent that from happening. At the successful first meeting of this informal plenary, the President vowed to very soon undertake his responsibility to take the process forward. That time has now come. Yesterday morning, delegations already received the work plan announced on January 29. The plan is the result of a painstaking and diligent exercise of deduction. From that exercise, while guided by the authoritative sources the President identified in his 29 January address, we concluded that this is the work plan that emanates from Decision 62/557. What is more, the plan, setting out how to negotiate and when to negotiate, also does justice to the overwhelming and across-the-board appetite among Member States to get started – not with negotiations on the negotiations, but with negotiations on the substance. For too long, we have been dipping our toes in the water. Now, at long last, we finally dive into these negotiations. If we rush the process and swim back to the surface too quickly, we might not survive because of decompression sickness. But on the other hand, if we stay under too long, we will run out of air and surely succumb. I don't believe that either fate will befall us, because I believe that you will rise to the challenge. Let us now take a deep breath before we dive into the deep end on March 4, commencing the implementation of our work plan. Every day, every way possible, I will help you with that, as described in the letter of the President. We are of course impartial to any of the positions, but partial to progress.

Thank you.

Closing statement by H.E. Zahir Tanin,  
Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations in New York,  
Chair of the Intergovernmental Negotiations  
on the question of equitable representation and increase in the membership of the  
Security Council and other matters related to the Council.

Informal plenary of the General Assembly,  
UNHQ New York, 19 February 2009.

1. Let me close the meeting now by thanking all delegations for their support and for their constructive participation. Our meeting today has only strengthened my conviction that we will be able to achieve decisive progress without unnecessary delay. Obviously I cannot prejudge the specifics of the process ahead. But I can tell you that, whatever happens, for the President and me, from start to finish, our lodestar will continue to be Decision 62/557, and that we will continue to be guided by the UN Charter, the World Summit Outcome Document, the relevant rules and procedures, legal advice, past practice and your input through the Open-ended Working Group. I will carefully study the many suggestions brought forward today, including the composition of a composite paper. In any case, as indicated by the President of the General Assembly in his letter, I will use all means at my disposal, including oral statements and letters concerning the individual meetings, to guide Member States during the coming consecutive negotiation meetings about the five key issues. It is on these issues that the President of the General Assembly has invited you to focus in a comprehensive fashion. For all five, it is about providing more detail and where possible showing flexibility on your position, including through new proposals. We meet in an informal setting. This should mean brief interventions and interaction. I will certainly encourage that to the best of my abilities. Let me clarify, that an individual meeting could go on for longer than one day, so that we do justice to the scope of every single issue. We should not have any illusions: these are complicated matters, in other words, we are on thin ice. However, as Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "In skating over thin ice, our safety is our speed." So let's speedily continue with intergovernmental negotiations "in good faith, with mutual respect and in an open, inclusive and transparent manner [...] seeking a solution that can garner the widest possible political acceptance by Member States."

Thank you, the meeting is closed.