

Address to the United Nations General Assembly
Tuesday, September 21, 2004
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Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen: Thank you for the honor of addressing this general assembly. The American people respect the idealism that gave life to this organization. And we respect the men and women of the UN, who stand for peace and human rights in every part of the world. Welcome to New York City, and welcome to the United States of America.

During the past three years, I have addressed this General Assembly in a time of tragedy for my country, and in times of decision for all of us. Now we gather at a time of tremendous opportunity for the UN, and for all peaceful nations. For decades, the circle of liberty, and security, and development has been expanding in our world. This progress has brought unity to Europe, and self-government to Latin America and Asia, and new hope to Africa. Now we have the historic chance to widen the circle even further ... to fight radicalism and terror with justice and dignity ... and to achieve a true peace, founded on human freedom.

The United Nations and my country share the deepest commitments. Both the American Declaration of Independence and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaim the equal value and dignity of every human life. That dignity is honored by the rule of law ... limits on the power of the state ... respect for women ... protection of private property ... free speech ... equal justice ... and religious tolerance. That dignity is dishonored by oppression, corruption, tyranny, bigotry, terrorism, and all violence against the innocent. And both of our founding documents affirm that this bright line between justice and injustice – between right and wrong – is the same in every age, and every culture, and every nation.

Wise governments also stand for these principles for very practical and realistic reasons. We know that dictators are quick to choose aggression, while free nations strive to resolve differences in peace. We know that oppressive governments support terror, while free governments fight the terrorists in their midst. We know that free peoples embrace progress and life, instead of becoming the recruits for murderous ideologies.

Every nation that wants peace will share the benefits of a freer world. And every nation that seeks peace has an obligation to help build that world. Eventually, there is no safe isolation from terror networks, or the failed states that shelter them, or outlaw regimes, or weapons of mass destruction. Eventually, there is no safety in looking away, seeking the quiet life by ignoring the struggles and oppression of others.

In this young century, our world needs a new definition of security. Our security is not merely found in spheres of influence, or some balance of power. The security of our world is found in the advancing rights of mankind.

These rights are advancing across the world – and across the world, the enemies of human rights are responding with violence. Terrorists and their allies believe that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the American Bill of Rights, and every charter of liberty ever written, are lies – to be burned and destroyed and forgotten. They believe that dictators should control every mind and tongue in the Middle East and beyond. They believe that suicide and torture and murder are fully justified to serve any goal they declare. And they act on their beliefs.

In the last year alone, terrorists have attacked police stations, and banks, and commuter trains, and synagogues ... and a school filled with children. This month in Beslan [bez-LAN] we saw, once again, how the terrorists measure their success – in the death of the innocent, and in the pain of grieving families. Svetlana Dzebisov [day-BEES-off] was held hostage along with her son and her nephew – and her nephew did not survive. She recently visited the cemetery, and saw what she called the "little graves." She said, "I understand that there is evil in the world. But what have these little creatures done...?"

Members of the United Nations: The Russian children did nothing to deserve such awful suffering, and fright, and death. The people of Madrid, and Jerusalem, and Istanbul, and Baghdad have done nothing to deserve sudden and random murder. These acts violate the standards of justice in all cultures, and the principles of all religions. All civilized nations are in this struggle together. And all must fight the murderers.

We are determined to destroy terror networks wherever they operate – and the United States is grateful to every nation that is helping to seize

terrorist assets, track down their operatives, and disrupt their plans. We are determined to end the state sponsorship of terror – and my nation is grateful to all that participated in the liberation of Afghanistan. We are determined to prevent proliferation, and to enforce the demands of the world – and my nation is grateful to the soldiers of many nations who have helped to deliver the Iraqi people from an outlaw dictator.

That dictator agreed in 1991, as a condition of a ceasefire, to fully comply with all Security Council resolutions – then ignored more than a decade of those-resolutions. Finally, the Security Council promised serious consequences for his defiance. And the commitments we make must have meaning. When we say "serious consequences," for the sake of peace, there must be serious consequences. And so a coalition of nations enforced the just demands of the world.

Defending our ideals is vital – but it is not enough. Our broader mission as UN members is to apply these ideals to the great issues of our time. Our wider goal is to promote hope and progress as the alternatives to hatred and violence. Our great purpose is to build a better world beyond the war on terror.

Because we believe in human dignity, America and many nations have established a global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. In three years the contributing countries have funded projects in more than 90 countries, and pledged a total of 5.6 billion dollars to these efforts. America has undertaken a 15 billion dollar effort to provide prevention, treatment, and humane care in nations afflicted by AIDS, placing a special focus on 15 countries where the need is most urgent. AIDS is the greatest health crisis of our time, and our unprecedented commitment will bring new hope to those who have walked too long in the shadow of death.

Because we believe in human dignity, America and many nations have joined together to confront the evil of trafficking in human beings. We are supporting organizations that rescue the victims, passing stronger anti-trafficking laws, and warning travelers that they will be held to account for supporting this modern form of slavery. Women and children should never be exploited for pleasure or greed, anywhere on earth.

Because we believe in human dignity, we should take seriously the protection of life from exploitation under any pretext. In this session, the

UN will consider a resolution sponsored by Costa Rica calling for a comprehensive ban on human cloning. I support that resolution, and I urge all governments to affirm a basic ethical principle: no human life should ever be produced and destroyed for the benefit of another.

Because we believe in human dignity, America and many nations have changed the way we fight poverty, curb corruption, and provide aid. In 2002 we created the Monterrey Consensus, a bold approach that links new aid from developed nations to real reform in developing ones. And through the Millennium Challenge Account, my nation is increasing our aid to developing nations that expand economic freedom and invest in the education and health of their own people.

Because we believe in human dignity, America and many nations have acted to lift the crushing burden of debt that limits the growth of developing economies, and holds millions of people in poverty. Since these efforts began in 1996, poor countries with the heaviest debt burdens have received more than 30 billion dollars of relief. And to prevent the build up of future debt, my country and other nations have agreed that international financial institutions should increasingly provide new aid in the form of grants rather than loans.

Because we believe in human dignity, the world must have more effective means to stabilize regions in turmoil, and to halt religious violence and ethnic cleansing. We must create permanent capabilities to respond to future crises.

The United States and Italy have proposed a Global Peace Operations Initiative. G-8 countries will train 75,000 peacekeepers – initially from Africa – so they can conduct operations on that continent and elsewhere. The countries of the G-8 will help this peacekeeping force with deployment and logistical needs.

At this hour, the world is witnessing terrible suffering and horrible crimes in the Darfur region of Sudan, crimes my government has concluded are genocide. The United States played a key role in efforts to broker a cease-fire, and we are providing humanitarian assistance to the Sudanese people. Rwanda and Nigeria have deployed forces in Sudan to help improve security so aid can be delivered. The Security Council adopted a new Resolution that supports an expanded African Union force

to help prevent further bloodshed ... and urges the government of Sudan to stop flights by military aircraft in Darfur. We congratulate the members of the Council on this timely and necessary action. And I call on the government of Sudan to honor the cease-fire it signed, and to stop the killing in Darfur.

Because we believe in human dignity, peaceful nations must stand for the advance of democracy. No other system of government has done more to protect minorities, to secure the rights of labor; to raise the status of women, or to channel human energy to the pursuits of peace. We have witnessed the rise of democratic governments in predominantly Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian cultures. Democratic institutions have taken root in modern societies, and in traditional societies. When it comes to the desire for liberty and justice, there is no clash of civilizations. People everywhere are capable of freedom, and worthy of freedom.

Finding the full promise of representative government takes time, as America has found in two centuries of debate and struggle. Nor is there only one form of representative government – because democracies, by definition, take on the unique character of the peoples that create them. Yet this much we know with certainty: The desire for freedom resides in every heart. And that desire cannot be contained forever by prison walls, or martial laws, or secret police. Over time, and across the earth, freedom will find a way.

Freedom is finding a way in Iraq and Afghanistan – and we must continue to show our commitment to democracy in those nations. The liberty that many have won at a cost must be secured. As members of the United Nations, we all have a stake in the success of the world's newest democracies.

Not long ago, outlaw regimes in Baghdad and Kabul threatened the peace and sponsored terrorists. These regimes destabilized one of the world's most vital – and most volatile – regions. They brutalized their peoples, in defiance of all civilized norms.

Today, the Iraqi and Afghan people are on the path to democracy and freedom. The governments that are rising will pose no threat to others. Instead of harboring terrorists, they are fighting terrorist groups. And this progress is good for the long term security of us all.

The Afghan people are showing extraordinary courage under difficult conditions. They are fighting to defend their nation from Taliban hold-outs, and helping to strike against terrorist killers. They are reviving their economy. They have adopted a constitution that protects the rights of all, while honoring their nation's most cherished traditions. More than ten million Afghan citizens ... over four million of them women ... are now registered to vote in next month's presidential election. To any who would question whether Muslim societies can be democratic societies, the Afghan people are giving their answer.

Since the last meeting of this General Assembly, the people of Iraq have regained sovereignty. Today, in this hall, the Prime Minister of Iraq and his delegation represent a country that has rejoined the community of nations. The government of Prime Minister Allawi has earned the support of every nation that believes in self-determination and desires peace. And under Security Council Resolutions 1511 and 1546, the world is providing that support. The UN, and its member nations, must respond to Prime Minister Allawi's request, and do more to help build an Iraq that is secure, democratic, federal, and free.

A democratic Iraq has ruthless enemies – because terrorists know the stakes in that country. They know that a free Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will be a decisive blow against their ambitions for that region. So a terrorist group associated with al-Qaida is now one of the main groups killing the innocent in Iraq today – conducting a campaign of bombings against civilians, and the beheadings of bound men. Coalition forces now serving in Iraq are confronting the terrorists and foreign fighters, so peaceful nations around the world will never have to face them within our own borders.

Our coalition is standing beside a growing Iraqi security force. The NATO Alliance is providing vital training to that force. More than 35 nations have contributed money and expertise to help rebuild Iraq's infrastructure. And as the Iraqi Interim Government moves toward national elections, officials from the United Nations are helping Iraqis build the infrastructure of democracy. These selfless people are doing heroic work ... and are carrying on the great legacy of Sergio de Mello.

As we have seen in other countries, one of the main terrorist goals is to undermine, disrupt, and influence election outcomes. And we can expect terrorist attacks to escalate as Afghanistan and Iraq approach national elections. The work ahead is demanding. But these difficulties will not shake our conviction that the future of Afghanistan and Iraq is a future of liberty. The proper response to difficulty is not to retreat – it is to prevail.

The advance of freedom always carries a cost – paid by the bravest among us. America mourns the losses to our Nation, and to many others. And today I assure every friend of Afghanistan and Iraq, and every enemy of liberty: We will stand with the people of Afghanistan and Iraq until their hopes of freedom and security are fulfilled.

These two nations will be a model for the broader Middle East – a region where millions have been denied basic human rights and simple justice. For too long, many nations – including my own – tolerated, even excused, oppression in the Middle East in the name of stability. Oppression became common, but stability never arrived. We must take a different approach. We must help the reformers of the Middle East as they work for freedom, and strive to build a community of peaceful, democratic nations.

This commitment to democratic reform is essential to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Peace will not be achieved by Palestinian rulers who intimidate opposition, tolerate corruption, and maintain ties to terrorist groups. The long suffering Palestinian people deserve better. They deserve true leaders capable of creating and governing a free and peaceful Palestinian state.

Even after the setbacks and frustrations of recent months, good will and hard effort can achieve the promise of the roadmap to peace. Those who would lead a new Palestinian state should adopt peaceful means to achieve the rights of their people, and create the reformed institutions of a stable democracy. Arab states should end incitement in their own media, cut off public and private funding for terrorism, and establish normal relations with Israel. Israel should impose a settlement freeze, dismantle unauthorized outposts, end the daily humiliation of the Palestinian people, and avoid any actions that prejudice final negotiations. And world leaders should withdraw all favor and support from any Palestinian ruler who fails his people and betrays their cause.

The democratic hopes we see growing in the Middle East are growing everywhere. In the words of the Burmese democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi: "We do not accept the notion that democracy is a Western value. To the contrary, democracy simply means good government rooted in responsibility, transparency, and accountability." Here at the United Nations, you know this to be true. In recent years, this organization has helped create a new democracy in East Timor, and the UN has aided other nations in making the transition to self-rule.

Because I believe the advance of liberty is the path to both a safer and better world, today I propose establishing a Democracy Fund within the United Nations. This is a great calling for this great organization. The Fund would help countries lay the foundations of democracy by instituting the rule of law, independent courts, a free press, political parties, and trade unions. Money from the fund would also help set up voter precincts and polling places, and support the work of election monitors. To show our commitment to the new Democracy Fund, the United States will make an initial contribution, and I urge other nations to contribute as well.

Today I have outlined a broad agenda to advance human dignity, and enhance the security of all of us. The defeat of terror ... the protection of human rights ... the spread of prosperity ... the advance of democracy ... these causes, these ideals, call us to great work in the world. Each of us alone can only do so much. Together we can accomplish so much more.

History will honor the high ideals of this organization. The charter states them with clarity: "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" ... "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights" ... "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."

Let history also record that our generation of leaders followed through on these ideals, even in adversity. Let history show that in a decisive decade, members of the United Nations did not grow weary in our duties, or waver in meeting them. I am confident that this young century will be liberty's century. I believe we will rise to this moment, because I know the character of so many nations and leaders represented here today. And I have faith in the transforming power of freedom.

Thank you.