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THE SECRETARY GENERAL

ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A Stronger UN for a Better World

New York, 25 September 2007

Mr. President,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Congratulations on your election, Mr. President. Welcome, all, to New York in this beautiful autumn season.

It is a pleasure and an honor to be with you, at this opening of the general debate of our 62nd General Assembly. I expect the year ahead to be among the most challenging in our history. And I am sure that, together, we can make it one of the most successful.

We are off to a strong start. During the past week, we hosted a high-level meeting of the Africa Steering Group on our Millennium Development Goals—a clear signal of an important priority. World leaders also met to discuss our way forward on the Middle East, Afghanistan, Darfur and Iraq. Yesterday we concluded a highly successful conference on climate change.

Our goal was to galvanize our efforts, to coordinate our work under one roof – this roof of our United Nations — so that we fight global warming together, as one. This, in itself, is a signal accomplishment. It is a model of how I hope we can work together in the future.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Looking to the coming year, and beyond, we can foresee a daunting array of challenges to come. They are problems that respect no borders – that no country, big or small, rich or poor, can resolve on its own.

More than ever, we live in an era of collective action. Often it seems as though everybody wants the UN to do everything. We cannot deliver everything, of course. But that cannot be an excuse for doing nothing.

Hence the theme of these remarks: A Stronger United Nations for a Better World.

Our changing world needs a stronger UN. We all understand the importance of a strong, robust, empowered Secretariat. My vision is an administration focused on results—efficient, directed, pragmatic and accountable, an administration representing excellence, integrity and pride in serving the global good.

To deliver on this vision, we must modernize ourselves. We need an internal climate change at the UN. We need to think freshly about how we do our work. Our main themes should be to simplify, rationalize and delegate.

To deliver on the world's high expectations for us, we need to be faster, more flexible and mobile. We need to pay less attention to rhetoric, and more attention to results—to getting things done.

I place a very high priority on implementing the management reforms you have previously approved to promote greater transparency, accountability and efficiency. I welcome the progress we have made over the past nine months in streamlining our budget processes, crafting our Capital Master Plan and putting our financial house in order. I am especially grateful to the 102 governments that have paid their annual budget assessments in full.

Together, we successfully re-organized our peacekeeping operations, affecting more than 100,000 UN field personnel in 18 multinational missions. I plan to continue the effort by strengthening the Department of Political Affairs. We must become more proactive in responding to crises. Well-planned and executed preventive diplomacy can save many lives and forestall many tragedies—a core Charter responsibility of our UN.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will leave no stone unturned to end the tragedy in Darfur. The government of Sudan must live up to its pledge to join comprehensive peace talks and implement a ceasefire. We must also move forward with the agreement that ended the long-running civil war between north and south and prepare for elections in 2009.

The crisis in Darfur grew from many causes. Any enduring solution must address all of them—security, politics, resources, water, humanitarian and development issues. There, as elsewhere, we must deal with root causes of conflict, however complex and entangled.

Peace in the Middle East is vital to the stability of the region and the world. We know what is required: an end to violence, an end to occupation, the creation of a Palestinian State at peace with itself and Israel, and a comprehensive regional peace between Israel and the Arab world. With renewed leadership from the Arab world and the United States, coupled with the efforts of Quartet Representative Tony Blair, the elements for a renewed push for peace are being brought together.

We also sincerely hope that the Lebanese people through national reconciliation will be able to restore political and social stability by electing their new president in accordance with their constitutional process.

Iraq has become the whole world's problem. With the new Security Council Resolution 1770, the UN has an important role in promoting political negotiation and national reconciliation, as well as in providing humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people. But we recognize that the safety and security of UN staff is paramount.

In Afghanistan, we must work more effectively with our partners to deal with drug trafficking and the financing of terrorism.

We are closely following events in Myanmar. We again urge the authorities in Myanmar to exercise utmost restraint, to engage without delay in dialogue with all the relevant parties to the national reconciliation process on the issues of concern to the people of Myanmar. In this regard, my Special Advisor is expected to visit Myanmar very soon.

From my first day in office, I have stressed the importance of disarmament, as mandated most recently in the General Assembly's support for my proposal to establish an Office of Disarmament Affairs. We must reinvigorate our effort to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related technology, and especially to prevent such material from falling into the hands of terrorists.

I am encouraged by recent progress on the DPRK issue. I sincerely hope that forthcoming inter-Korean Summit meeting will create a historic momentum, to bring peace, security, and eventually a peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

I am confident that we will reach a negotiated solution with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Our ultimate goal remains the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction. If we fail, these weapons may one day eliminate us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We at the UN must take the long view, in politics as in life. Even as we deal with the here and now, we must think about tomorrow.

Yesterday, I spoke about climate change as a defining issue of our time. We all agreed. Now is the time for action. Let us go to Bali and make a break-through.

We also agreed that solutions to global warming cannot come at the expense of economic development—the second pillar of the UN's work. Issues of development and social equity cannot take a backseat to issues of peace and security.

This year marks the midpoint for our Millennium Development Goals. We have had successes. Around the world, unprecedented numbers of people are lifting themselves out of poverty. Yet the rising tide of globalization has not lifted all boats.

We see this most acutely in Africa, home to most of what one World Bank economist calls “the bottom billion” of the world’s poor. We must pay careful attention to these nations with special needs. We must heed the voices of the world’s poorest peoples, who too often go unheard.

That is why I convened the MDG Africa Steering group earlier this month, bringing together leaders of major multilateral development organizations. Our Millennium goals remain achievable—so long as we help the poorest nations break free of the traps that ensnare them.

Some of those traps relate to bad governance. Others to disease and poor health care. It is intolerable that HIV/AIDS continues as a modern-day scourge. It is intolerable that almost 10 million children die each year before their fifth birthday, mostly from such preventable diseases as malaria. It is a scar on the moral conscience of the world.

This is not to say we will do things that these countries should, and can, do for themselves. The Asian Miracle has shown that successful development owes much to smart choices and rigorous execution.

For our part, we must try to make our multilateral development programs more effective and coherent, to better integrate our efforts in health, education, agriculture and infrastructure so as to deliver better results.

For their part, donor nations must do more to deliver on their promises of aid, debt relief and market access. Open, fair and non-discriminatory trading and financial systems are critical to the future of every developing country, in Africa and elsewhere. That is why we must do our utmost to advance the Doha Development Agenda, with its emphasis on development and “aid for trade.”

The third pillar of the UN, human rights, is codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which marks its sixtieth anniversary in 2008.

The Human Rights Council must live up to its responsibilities as the torchbearer for human rights consistently and equitably around the world. I will strive to translate the concept of our Responsibility to Protect from words to deeds, to ensure timely action so that populations do not face genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Our international tribunals continue their work, from Rwanda to Sierra Leone and, soon, Lebanon. The age of impunity is dead.

Meanwhile, the UN’s brave and exceptionally committed humanitarian aid workers do their best to save lives. They help protect civilian populations from the depredations of armed militias, children from starvation, women from shameful violence.

This year did not bring a natural disaster on the scale of the 2004 tsunami. But the intensity of floods, droughts and extreme weather, perhaps made worse by climate change, have brought pain and suffering to many millions. This, above all, is the UN’s front-line. We stand up to help those who cannot help themselves.

Excellencies and distinguished statesmen:

I am humbled, often, by the scale of the challenges before us. So much is expected of us. Delivering on those hopes, faithfully and effectively, will require great effort and discipline.

Transforming the way the UN does business—shifting our focus to emphasize results rather than bureaucratic process—will take patience, perseverance and courage.

The pendulum of history is swinging in our favor. Multilateralism is back. An increasingly interdependent world recognizes that the challenges of tomorrow are best dealt with through the UN. Indeed, they can *only* be dealt with through the UN.

Thank you.