



BELGIUM

Statement by H.E. Mr. Guy Verhofstadt,
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium

At the High Level Plenary Meeting of the General
Assembly

New York, 15 September 2005

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Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate and thank Secretary General Kofi Annan. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the United Nations, he seized the opportunity to increase its strength and legitimacy. We need the United Nations more than ever. Belgium agrees with the ambitious proposals of the Secretary General, as stated in his report "In larger freedom". The outcome document from last Tuesday is not as ambitious, but it gives the UN a strategic direction and a chance for a fresh start. Our organization will be better equipped to tackle the needs of the 21st century. I would like to thank Mr. Ping in particular for his persistence and dedication to provide the UN with a new mandate and a new guideline.

Belgium supports the basic idea that security, development and human rights cannot be separated. This can only succeed if we can build upon powerful and representative institutions.

My country wishes to grant its full support to the immediate establishment of the Human Rights Council. We are pleased that the concept of "responsibility to protect" has finally been integrated in the document. This should enable us to avoid tragedies like the one in Rwanda in 1994.

At the same time, we will continue to combat terrorism, to fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to fight against the distribution of weapons that lead to instability, misery and poverty.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let us not forget the need to invest in development. If we want to create a safe, free and democratic world, investment in development is an absolute necessity. This is why five years ago all of us proclaimed the Millennium Development Goals and why we reconfirm them today.

On a number of points, we have made progress, which is encouraging. But unfortunately, these improvements are systematically undermined by poor results in Africa. Let us for example consider Goal One, reducing extreme poverty by half. If the current trend continues, this objective will not be achieved in Africa by 2015, but only in 2150: One hundred fifty years late.

While the United Nations is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary, life expectancy in Africa still does not exceed 46 years. Six out of ten youngsters are infected with HIV. Twenty-five million people already died from AIDS and as many are faced with this dire perspective. Of thirty-five poorest countries in the world, 31 are in Africa. Since 1998, more than 4 million people died in armed conflicts in Central Africa. This is the highest death toll since World War II. For every five children born in Africa today, one still dies from easily cured diseases, hunger or malnutrition.

This is unacceptable. This situation is morally unacceptable, politically dangerous and economically wrong. We must drag Africa out of this vicious circle. And we know how to do it. We know what Africa needs political and economic stability in order to allow economic growth; investment in infrastructure, in health, in education as well as an honest access to world markets and, of course, peace.

Peace is a first step. Peace means an end to arms trade. That is why Belgium supports the proposal to start as soon as possible negotiations aimed at achieving an international agreement on arms trade.

As much as peace is needed, good governance is indispensable, good governance that can achieve results. We can only realize this goal if we coordinate our aid and efforts worldwide. I am convinced that the establishment of the Peace-Building Commission is crucial. Belgium wants to contribute actively to this objective and is fully prepared to share her experience with transition in Congo and Burundi.

But we do insist that agreements be honored. Too many promises have been broken: promises made by African leaders, by many Western leaders, but mainly by the entire international community. At present, Belgium spends 0.45 % of her GDP to ODA. We are thus on schedule to reach 0.7% by 2010. We earmark 2/3 of these resources to the least developed countries, which is the highest percentage in the world.

Mr. Secretary-General,

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During this Summit, we have reinforced the promise made five years ago to hundreds of millions of people to offer them more prosperity, more peace, more freedom. Today, those people want to hear only one message: we are people of our word, we will keep our promise.

Thank you