

**STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT SERZH SARGSYAN
AT THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE 63rd SESSION OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

New York, September 25, 2008

**Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General
Excellencies,**

First, allow me to express gratitude to Srjan Kerim, President of the 62nd session of the General Assembly for his able leadership and congratulate and wish success to the President of the 63rd session Mr. Miguel D'Escoto Brockman.

Dear Friends,

I am representing a country which during the last several weeks appeared in a situation unacceptable in the 21st century.

Once again blood was shed in the South Caucasus and once again innocent people died because we, the leaders failed to bring a peaceful resolution to the existing conflicts. The armed conflict, which erupted in the matter of hours, threatened not only the entire region but well beyond it.

Nowadays the unsettling expression "Cold War" has emerged again. I hold the view that the main task of this 63rd session should be a joint demand to unequivocally rule out this kind of developments. The memories of the previous "Cold War" are pretty much fresh, and its consequences are still there.

I think on that direction our main task should be the establishment of a new, dependable, and viable structure. Challenges facing the humankind in the last decades have been transformed and reshaped in a way that makes it impossible to tackle them exclusively with the structures established after the World War II. We continue to response to the horizontal, netlike challenges of today such as terrorism, international crime, drug trafficking and others, through the institutions which are envisaged predominantly to smooth over the controversies among the states. Regional cooperation can become one of the essential means to address these new challenges. Armenia has always been promoter of this kind of cooperation, and we are confident that cooperation is one of the most effective means of attending to the problems existing among the states. With this regard open borders, crisscrossing lines of communication and interrelated economic systems are crucial.

The UN was among the first to respond to the current global problems resulted from the rising food and fuel prices. It is a real danger for all the countries of the world. For poor countries the consequences will be devastating. Unfortunately, in this situation we continue to witness unilateral sanctions and border closures.

In face of global challenges, the countries should joint their efforts to avoid the further deterioration of the situation and to provide for the implementation of the sustainable development agenda. Otherwise we will jeopardize our collective efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Neighboring states have always had and will be having some problems. However, those problems cannot be solved if there is no dialogue.

Keeping that in mind and taking advantage of a football game between our national teams, I invited the President of Turkey to Yerevan. I was pleased with the bold decision of President Gule to accept the invitation which made him my co-author in the "football diplomacy" initiative.

We discussed the array of bilateral and regional issues. The most important was our decision not to leave the current problems to the future generations. I am confident that the time has come to solve Armenian-Turkish problems and on that issue I observed similar determination on behalf of President Gule. I am certain that it is necessary to move fast and resolutely on that direction.

Mr. President,

The events of the last few weeks shocked the South Caucasus region, making it a centerpiece of the international media. I think those were very serious lessons for all of us. I would mention only two of them:

First, we, the UN member states must strictly follow the letter and spirit of the UN Charter. If any country increases its military budget and brags about it, if limitations on weapons stipulated by the international agreements are being violated and done so openly, if a country signed a cease-fire agreement, which constitutes an international responsibility, but on any occasion threatens to resume military actions, it must receive a rapid and firm response.

Prevention is preferable over cure and a potential military conflict must be prevented on the stage of planning. We must confirm unequivocally that the violation of the existing cease-fire or the threat of violation contains elements of aggression.

Second, the time has come to seriously consider the right of people to self-determination. We continue to witness that in our times the fight of people for self-determination inevitably turns into the struggle for survival. People striving for self-determination are either provided with the opportunity to freely express their

will through the referendum or that people are being expelled from their land, undergoing ethnic cleansing or genocide. There is no doubt in my mind that in the 21st century it mustn't be the way.

We don't insist on and actually oppose the idea that each claim for self-determination should be resolved through secession. However we witness that that outcome more often than not becomes the solution for the conflicts.

There is no doubt that to be viable that solution should be endorsed by all the parties involved. That is why we continue to actively negotiate with the Azeris in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group seeking the recognition by that country of the 16 years-long actually independent Republic of Nagorno Karabakh.

The people of Nagorno Karabakh, who followed the legal path for declaring their desire for self-determination, were subjected to a brutal war. For months they were on the brink of extinction. At that time it was only an autonomous region which had neither a regular army, nor arms and ammunition, nor any intention or ability to occupy any of Azeri territory. I think it is at least not fair to label the people who fought for their right to live the "occupants". Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is doing exactly that, using even this high podium.

Mr. President,

In my country the schoolchildren are well familiar with the Organization of the United Nations. These children – the tomorrow's leaders of my country and of the world – may not have a profound understanding of the UN Charter; however they know that this organization was created to provide peace and security for the human kind, to promote friendship among the nations, to solve the problems jointly, and to protect human rights.

The schoolchildren in my country have a subconscious trust in the UN since in their perception it is first of all a building with the memorial of the "twisted gun" in front of it.

Months ago within this building a resolution was adopted with only 39 states out of 146 voting "for". It was a resolution which is related to the one of the episodes of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

A fundamental and sensitive problem with deep roots, painful and bloody developments, and immense efforts to give it a peaceful resolution was decided upon by the majority to support one of the parties. The outcome was more than predictable – a new wave of belligerent statements in Azerbaijan, fake laurels of political speculations, etc.

But wasn't that voting a lip service to Azerbaijan? I hope that the real interest of Azerbaijan is not in miscellaneous international labelings of the different

elements of the conflict but rather the peaceful and comprehensive resolution of the conflict, just like it is in the interest of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia.

The process mediated by the Co-Chairs of the Mink Group is to reach exactly that goal, and I think that understand made almost 4/5 abstain from voting "yes" for that resolution. Look at the voting of the US, France and Russia – the most well-informed third parties, regarding the NK conflict and its resolution.

Is it absolutely necessary to shed blood to understand that the frozen conflicts demand expert and conscientious approach and cannot be solved through the discussions in different fora?

We have done some serious work with the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. Isn't it possible to at least abstain from creating new challenges for the process? Isn't it our mutual goal to erect a monument of a "twisted gun" for the Armenian and Azeri children in our region? Let me assure you, these kids deserve it.

Mr. President,

This year we will be celebrating two significant international law achievements: the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 60th Anniversary of the Convention on Genocide Prevention.

For us, the Armenians, as for the people who survived the Genocide, these anniversaries are more than just important. Armenia has been and will be doing every possible thing at the UN to provide for a continuous advocacy of the Genocide Convention and its enforcement. Genocide can not be worrying just one nation, Genocide is a crime against humanity.

As for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we fully realize that Armenia, as a young democracy, has important things to do in order to guarantee the full and efficient implementation of the entire complex of human rights.

On that road we are trying to learn from the countries with the extensive experience and not to repeat others' mistakes. These lessons are not always easy to take but we are confident that for a country like Armenia it is a fundamental guarantee of the sustainable development.

At the same time we realize that in a rapidly changing reality, along with the scientific progress and advancement of information technologies, the protection of human rights and processes of monitoring the fulfillment of that obligation by the states should be seriously reviewed and reconsidered.

Thank you.