

United Nations Nations Unies

THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly, on “The United Nations: Our Shared Responsibility to address Humanity’s Global Challenges” for the German Association for the United Nations

Excellencies,
Distinguished members,
Ladies & Gentlemen

It is indeed an honor and a privilege to be invited to address the German Association for the United Nations.

Today, I would like to talk to you about our shared responsibility to address humanity's global challenges.

Yesterday I had a very productive discussion on some of these issues with Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and with Mrs. HeideMarie Wieczorek-zeul, Minister of Economic Development and Cooperation. I also continued these discussions earlier today with Mr. Hans-Urlich Klose, Deputy Chairperson of the committee on Foreign Affairs and Mr. Gernot Erler, Minister of state for Foreign affairs.

But first I would like to recognize the important contributions Germany is making as President of both the G8 and European Union.

I would like to commend the leadership you have shown in initiating a joint EU-Africa strategy; and, ensuring that climate change, poverty reduction, and the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa remain priorities for the G8.

Germany has also played an important role in hosting the Quartet in Berlin.

And, Chancellor Angela Merkel recently held an important meeting with the President of the Palestinian National Authority to discuss the 'government of national unity'.

You are also actively involved in finding a peaceful settlement to the nuclear issue in Iran as well as to tackle the current crisis in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Your commitment to multilateralism and poverty reduction is an acknowledgement that these issues are central to our global economic stability and prosperity.

Distinguished members;

The United Nations was created to end wars between nations by replacing bombs and bullets with cooperation and compromise.

It represented the burning hope of a generation for a better world.

If we had not had the wisdom to conceive of the United Nations, then we would be trying to invent it now.

Multilateralism is essential to globalisation, and the United Nations is the heart of multilateralism.

For all our successes and failures during the past 60 years, the United Nations has served us well and achieved much.

It has played a unique role in delivering a global consensus to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

In the past 20 years, over 400 million people have been lifted out of absolute poverty - equivalent almost, to the total population of the EU.

It has increased its peace-keeping operations from five in the late 1980s to over twenty today. This has been a major factor in the reduction of armed conflict.

Distinguished Members,

The world we live in now is very different from the world of the post-war years. Things have changed.

Many conflicts are not between states, but within states.

Terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction threaten us all.

Energy security is increasingly driving foreign policy in many countries.

Climate change threatens to undermine development, hitting hardest those countries least responsible.

As water becomes scarce, so securing its supply will become increasingly important.

Global health crises - HIV/AIDS and bird flu - represent new threats.

And, huge variations in wealth are giving rise to global inequality.

From the devastation of Europe after the war, the EU is now the world's largest donor and its largest trader.

And, new powers are emerging - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa - challenging the old status quo.

Information technologies allow traumatic events in one part of the globe to be beamed into our living rooms within hours. We are daily witnesses to the suffering of our fellow human beings.

All this means that the structures we created after the 2nd World War are not able to cope as best they might.

Distinguished members,

At the World Summit in New York in 2005, Heads of States and government set out a vision of a more coherent, more effective United Nations able to rise to these challenges.

Since the Summit we have had a clear roadmap for reform, and we have made concrete progress.

A dedicated institutional mechanism - the Peacebuilding Commission and Fund - has been established to address the special needs of countries emerging from conflict.

The new Human Rights Council is functioning; the Central Emergency Revolving Fund is operational; and the Economic and Social Council is being strengthened.

As part of the revitalization of the General Assembly I have also initiated three thematic debates, involving NGOs, academics and the private sector;

- on development and the Millennium Development Goals;
- on the importance of gender equality and women empowerment; and,
- a debate to address the challenge for peace among civilizations.

Distinguished members,

As President of the General Assembly, I am also working closely with Member States on several outstanding reforms from the 2005 World Summit, most notably, reform of the Security Council and environmental governance.

It is apparent that there is no consensus on the various formulas that have previously been put forward to reform the Security Council.

However, there is agreement that reform is essential to make its decisions more legitimate and to better reflect geopolitical realities.

I have recently established a fresh series of consultation on Security Council reform. The key issues have been grouped into clusters, each lead by a Facilitator on my behalf.

I am confident that these consultations will pinpoint areas of agreement, and illuminate potential compromises to provide the 'building blocks' for a negotiated outcome.

On environmental governance we can no longer refute the scientific evidence: climate change threatens the development goals for millions of the world's poorest people.

We have waited too long and we have lacked coordination in our efforts to begin dealing with this problem.

We need clear objectives and strong ecological governance at the global level, a concept that continues to elude us.

We must agree on a strategy that reflects our shared concern to ensure that the requirements of economic growth take environmental and social considerations fully into account.

I am consulting Member States on how to improve and strengthen the institutional framework of the UN's environmental activities.

By reaching consensus on these important reforms we have the opportunity to make a real difference. The support of Germany and the EU will be vital.

Distinguished members,

Out of the ashes of the Second World War came a clear vision of what a better world would look like.

Over sixty years later, we're still trying to build that world.

Our very survival depends on us doing this together. But the means by which we seek to achieve this are going to have to change, just as the world has changed.

It is our shared responsibility to strengthen and reform the institutions that are our only and best hope of building that world.

Only then will we have done our duty.

Only then will we be able to pass our world on safely and securely to the generations that will come after us.

Thank you very much.