

28 March 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,  
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,  
on “The UN in the Era of Globalisation: Why we need a New Culture  
of International Relations”**

Madame President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank Gunvor Kronman the Director of the Swedish-Finnish Cultural Centre and all the other organisers of this event. The Hana Forum has a unique role in developing Nordic culture and cooperation and it is an honour to have been invited to give the keynote address.

I have a personal affinity for this type of regional co-operation. In 2001, as Minister of Foreign Affairs for Macedonia, I proposed that the Balkan countries should follow the example of the ‘Nordic Model’ of co-operation in energy, infrastructure, culture, transport and the environment.

Though from different corners of Europe both Macedonia and Finland have supported a peaceful and unified Europe. I am grateful to Finland for the key role that your government played in promoting the Stability Pact for South-East Europe and its transition to the Regional Cooperation Council, as well as, your strong support for EU enlargement.

Finland was also an important bridge builder and peacemaker during the Cold War and played a unique role in formalising European security cooperation by working to establish the OSCE.

Finland and other Nordic countries have been strong advocates of the United Nations since joining the organisation. In particular, they have been pioneers in promoting a more progressive approach to peacebuilding, peacekeeping and the UN’s humanitarian activities.

At the highest level of the United Nations the Nordics have contributed some great leaders, beginning with Trygve Lie, Dag Hammarskjold, and more recently Harri Holkeri, Jan Eliasson and Jan Egeland.

This demonstrates that small countries can make a big difference in the international policy agenda, and that each generation of leaders has different historical challenges to overcome.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When facing up to the challenges of their times after the ashes of the 2nd World War, world leaders forged a new system of international relations for the 20th century based on a vision of high ideals and public purpose.

The United Nations was founded to realize this new internationalism – to replace bombs and bullets with cooperation and compromise. The system was grounded on the principle that the collective wellbeing of all nations is necessary to safeguard the interests of each and every Member State.

However, to face up to today's emergencies and deal with tomorrow's challenges we need to move beyond that vision and radically reshape the existing international architecture.

Our globalized world has outgrown the rigid parameters of existing institutional frameworks.

The solutions to the global problems we face today, such as climate change, terrorism and sustainable development, can no longer be realized in an international system that puts the interests of states above all others.

We need a new kind of internationalism that caters to a new kind of global society - based on principled pragmatism and shared responsibility: a new way of thinking about our shared fate in a way that reflects the complexities of contemporary human and economic relations, with the well-being of the individual and communities at its centre.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since being elected President of the 62nd General Assembly, I have been calling for a new culture of international relations based on full respect of human rights, human security, the responsibility to protect and sustainable development.

These are intertwined and interrelated concepts. They represent the defining values of the 2005 World Summit – for this achievement we must recognize the foundation that Jan Ellisaon laid in the 60th session of the General Assembly.

They now need to become the principles driving forward the everyday work of the United Nations.

I believe that we have an important opportunity to make this a reality.

We are witnessing two seismic shifts in world affairs that offers the prospect of achieving a new culture of international relations. We now need to grasp this as a reality.

The first shift is the move away from state-centered policies towards human centered approaches that emphasize the individual as the primary subject and agent of policy, whether it's security in

its narrowest sense – such as in dealing with terrorism – or, a broader interpretation of security which incorporates economic and social development, as well as environmental protection. The second major shift can be characterized as a gradual move from a stress and preoccupation on rights to the accentuation and acceptance of responsibilities that go along with these rights -- both for the State as well as for the individual.

These two trends are interdependent. Through them we see the space for the emergence of a new culture of international relations, one where human transformation and collective consciousness are key to bridging the gap between policy and implementation and the full realization of our goals.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Where does the United Nations come into play in the era of globalization?

Today, we see a proliferation of actors in the international arena; influential individuals, civil society groups, think tanks, corporations and religious institutions that are not confined by state boundaries.

If harnessed correctly non-state actors can play an instrumental role in addressing contemporary global challenges from climate change, and growing international inequalities, to terrorism, sustainable development and global financial turbulence.

This does not mean that the nation-state system is dead. It is very much alive. Though states are no longer the sole actors in the international arena they continue to set the rules of the game. This is precisely why the United Nations remains relevant and important. The United Nations is the global forum;

- to harmonize and coordinate rules in a way that facilitates non-state actors to promote human rights, or dealing with global challenges like climate change;
- to maintain global peace and security, including addressing the threat from terrorism;
- to rebuild countries and institutions in the aftermath of conflict and political unrest;
- and, to build global partnerships for development, including with the private sector and NGOs to promote a more sustainable economic system that's not 'just for profit'.

However, the legitimacy and relevance of the United Nations depends above all on its ability to translate agreed rules and commitments into practical actions – whether resolutions of the Security Council, for example, in the form of practical action in Darfur; or, in the General Assembly on key development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals.

But, the United Nations cannot achieve these goals in isolation. That is why the General Assembly is using its convening power to involve more and more non-state actors.

Over the last few years, we have opened up UN Headquarters and welcomed more and more civil society groups, NGOs and representatives from the private sector.

This is because it will be impossible, for example;

- to fight HIV/AIDS globally without the cooperation of the pharmaceutical industry and their search for a medical remedy;
- to provide immediate humanitarian assistance without the support of committed NGOs working on the ground;
- to reduce exploitative practices, corruption, income inequality, and barriers that discourage innovation and entrepreneurship without engaging responsible businesses and encouraging them to build social capital, while contributing to sustainable development;
- to find a comprehensive solution to climate change – with all parties working together to increase investment in technologies in sensible ways – so that, for example increasing production of bio-fuel crops doesn't lead to increased food insecurity and higher prices for basic foods.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As well as non-state actors playing a more significant role, the individual is also gaining more importance as the locus of United Nations policy and activities.

The new culture of international relations that I have been describing and advocating also demands a new kind of global citizenship, where all peoples become active partners in creating our common future: a better, more sustainable and just future that benefits us all.

We have been moving in this direction since the 1990's by pursuing a policy framework that is more and more about the social and economic well being of people, of individuals and communities, and not only about the interests of governments or states.

This is evident, for example, as we see a narrow focus on national security giving way to a broader interpretation of human and economic security enshrined in the MDGs.

This comprehensive interpretation of human security implies that the United Nations acts to protect individual and communities from violent and non-violent threats and challenges, such as extreme poverty, hunger, disease, natural and man made disasters.

It represents a recognition that our shared goals demand that we think and act not just on behalf of immediate concerns but strive for long-term stability and prosperity, human rights and sustainable development.

If globalisation leaves the 'bottom billion' trapped in extreme poverty it will carry unacceptable costs in terms of human suffering, economic losses, political tension and potential security implications within and across borders.

Take climate change as another example.

Addressing this challenge is central to ensuring sustainable economic development and poverty reduction, but its policy implications also embrace issues of equity, ethics, human rights and security, particularly for the most vulnerable.

Last year the Security Council held a special debate to highlight the human security implications. It is now well recognized that there is a connection between the crisis in Darfur and environmental degradation caused by climate change.

These are issues for the full membership of the United Nations to address, which means the General Assembly and the Security Council will have to work together more closely.

I am sure that my distinguished predecessors, Harri (Holkeri) and Jan (Eliasson) can add their views on this. They have been an active part of the call for a more activist and cooperative Assembly that takes position on the broadening security challenges we face.

Let me mention one recent example that reflects these new realities: the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission by the General Assembly and the Security Council to assist countries emerging from conflicts and to help them stay on the course of peace.

But the challenge for the General Assembly is not simply to have on its agenda the relevant challenges the world faces today, but to also demonstrate that it is able to take action on them and make substantive progress in dealing with them.

This is what is at the centre of my efforts – this is also why I am engaging member states collectively and individually -- this is why I am here visiting Finland.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now let us briefly turn to the other shift: the gradual accentuation and acceptance of not only rights but responsibilities.

The rise of other actors in the international arena, the growing interdependence among states is changing the way states exercise their traditional sovereign rights.

Sovereignty is being transferred from its traditional absolute bearer - the nation-state as they try to cope with challenges that no longer respect national borders - to international bodies like the United Nations and to regional organizations, but also to the individual.

And, parallel with this gradual disaggregating of sovereignty we are also witnessing a growing emphasis on responsibilities. Sovereign rights are now understood to go hand in hand with global responsibilities. You can't have one without the other. It is just not credible to think otherwise anymore.

This culminated in 2005, with Member States accepting the principle of the responsibility to protect and created the Human Rights Council – for which we must praise the industrious efforts of Jan Ellisaon.

But stressing state's responsibilities and accepting the concept of the 'responsibility to protect' means that we must be willing and able to act in the face of threats to human security and willing and able to honour our responsibilities.

The acceptance of human centred security also requires us to take greater individual responsibility not only for one's self, and towards one's own goals, but also towards the 'other', on the basis of dignity and mutual respect.

However, to cope with all of these new challenges we need a more active and coherent United Nations system and greater trust and cooperation among Member States in the General Assembly. We can begin by encouraging all Member States to live up to their responsibilities; by emphasizing the interdependence of all nations; by recognizing that crucial issues on the Assembly's agenda are not about numbers, but about people; and, by involving a multitude of external actors in the Assembly's work: not only to assert their rights, but also to be willing to engage in efforts to make the exercise of these rights sustainable and universal.

This is what the new culture of international relations is all about.

But to achieve this we need a fundamental renewal and radical rethinking of what we expect from the United Nations, the Bretton Woods Institutions, as well as, from other international and regional bodies. This is the real challenge of our immediate future.

Within the United Nations, the most often heralded institutional reform relates to the Security Council even though this is but only one aspect of ongoing reforms that are necessary to transform the organization.

As the chairman of the Open-Ended Working Group, I am convinced that if Security Council reform is only about adding or subtracting countries, rather than about modifying our approach, with new ways of dealing with global challenges and international emergencies, then we will become trapped in an outdated institutional framework.

Finland's longtime former President Urho Kekkonen was able to find new ways when launching the OSCE process. Over 35 years ago when 35 Heads of State gathered to create the OSCE he stated that;

“Security is not achieved by erecting fences; security is achieved by opening gates.”

We should apply this principle when it comes to Security Council reform. Changing the composition of the Security Council must not be an end in itself, however necessary it is as a first step.

Reform of the Security Council must be part of embedding a new culture of international relations. The result must be a Council whose members are ready to share responsibility, willing and able to act to protect human life - as the body of last resort - whatever and wherever the threat may be.

Security Council reform, as well as, the wider reform of the United Nations system, and indeed all our attempts at international institutional reforms, must rest on the fundamental aim of creating more flexible, dynamic forums capable of acting on the basis of equilibrium of interests rather than on the outdated principle of maintaining a balance of power.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

World politics is certainly still also about war and peace and revolves around the exercise of power. But what is changing, is the increasing opportunities we all have to make a difference.

Governments and international actors like the United Nations have the obligation to facilitate these opportunities, but it is for the individual to grasp them and make them a reality. We now need to embody that same bold conviction and hope as the world did after the 2nd World War, and have the courage to make the necessary changes to the global architecture so that it is fit for the 21st century and beyond. It's in all our interests.

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