

United Nations Nations Unies

THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

26 September 2010

Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly, at the Cathedral Saint John the Divine

Very Reverend Dean Kowalski,
Esteemed Members of the Clergy,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now a well established tradition for the President of the General Assembly to speak in this magnificent Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine. I thank the Very Reverend Dean Kowalski, the Clergy and the Congregation for offering me this opportunity to be with you today. I also pay tribute to their commitment to the promotion of world peace.

Having been trained as an economist in a catholic University – the University of Fribourg, my home town in Switzerland – I have been taught that economics is not just about abstract concepts. I have come to understand and value the social dimension of economics: production and consumption are to serve the human being and not the opposite. I remember in particular lectures on the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. I was struck by the clarity and modernity of the *Rerum Novarum* encyclical, in which Pope Leo XIII set out the Church's response to the misery of the working class prevailing at the end of the nineteenth century. It highlighted the rights of the weak, the dignity of the poor and the obligations of the rich.

Today's lection, "The rich man and Lazarus", also questions our relationship to wealth. It is an invitation to empathize and have compassion for those who are poor and those who are suffering. Let us not be indifferent to the injustice and inequalities that affect millions and millions of people around the world.

Eradicating poverty and improving the well being of the most vulnerable is precisely what the international community is committed to achieve with the Millennium Development Goals.

This week, a great number of Heads of state and government convened in New York and reaffirmed their strong commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. I am optimistic that the international community will meet this challenge. It is our moral duty to keep our promise and we will keep it. We have the resources and we know how to succeed.

But success requires that we all join forces leading to a genuine partnership. This partnership must also include the private sector and civil society. It must extend to members of the Church and the Clergy.

I wish to thank you, Very Reverend Dean Kowalski and the community of Saint John the Divine, for your great interest in the mission of the UN and for the invaluable example that you give to other stakeholders.

In the Epistle to Timothy, Paul also speaks of poverty and highlights our responsibility to remain humble. When he says: “for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it”, I cannot resist to apply the sentence to our relationship to nature. We owe everything to earth, yet, earth owes us nothing.

Respect towards nature should be at the core of our efforts to protect environmental resources. 2010 has indeed been declared the International Year of Biodiversity by the UN General Assembly. Our efforts to protect the environment must, however, continue and endure beyond 2010. For I am convinced that if we want to tackle poverty and to improve the health, prosperity and security of present and future generations, we have to promote sustainable development. It is only by adopting economic structures that are more respectful of our environment that we will fulfill our duty towards our children and our grandchildren.

I hope that during the 65th session, the General Assembly will dedicate energy and passion to advance significantly on poverty reduction and sustainable development, two major issues for the well being of humankind.

No subject of concern to man and our planet is irrelevant to our debates. As the UN Charter tells us, the General Assembly is the pre-eminent forum for global debate. It has the legitimacy and the expertise to play a central role in global governance and to promote peace, security and prosperity in this world. To do so, the UN has to be strong, inclusive and open. We must listen and interact with major actors outside the walls of the Assembly Hall.

As I mentioned earlier, representatives of civil society and religious and spiritual groups have a key role to play in supporting our mission. They convey to us the aspirations of the people for more respect, more equality and more justice. They have the power to make governments move beyond words. They have the power to make them act.

Very Reverend Dean Kowalski,
Esteemed Members of the Clergy,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

If the UN and governments can promote peace by debating constructively and building consensus, peace, however, undoubtedly starts in the hearts.

The Church has the unique power to reach those hearts, where it can sow the seeds of peace.

May God bless you!