

2 May 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Lecture “How Relevant is the UN to Solutions of Today’s World
Problems?”**

Delivered on the occasion of the award of Doctorate Honoris Causa

Professor Vitaly Naumkin, Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
Members of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
Excellencies,
Distinguished scholars,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am humbled by this Honorary Doctorate, bestowed upon me by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly to your community of scholars.

I am all the more moved by this honor, given the universal prestige of the Russian Institute of Oriental Studies.

As one of the oldest academic institutions in Russia, with roots tracing as far back as 1818, the Institute has played, and continues to play, a paramount advisory policy role for the Russian Government.

The homage you are rendering me today is also an homage to the United Nations.

Russia, both as the successor state to the Soviet Union, and during Soviet times, has been and remains a staunch supporter of the United Nations.

It is therefore a great privilege for me to be here in Russia, with you today.

My thanks also go to my good friend, and an outstanding diplomat, His Excellency Ahmad Al-Mithadi, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Russian Federation.

It is thanks to him that we are gathered here in this beautiful reception, and I am sure that I speak for all of you in appreciating his generosity.

Excellencies,

Distinguished scholars,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me seize this opportunity to share with you some thoughts regarding the role of the United Nations today.

It is no secret that, in some parts of the world, the United Nations has suffered an image problem in recent years.

There has been a perception among some that the UN is irrelevant in today's global world.

Ironic, isn't it?

The UN – the most global, interconnected organization in the world, irrelevant in today's global, interconnected world?

It is universally acknowledged that this view has grown largely from within conservative camps in some Western countries and their media.

Russia, however, has stood fast in its support to the United Nations in those difficult times.

Yet, we must admit that the world has indeed changed since the UN's establishment in 1945.

At the time the UN was born, 750 million people – almost one third of the world's population – lived in colonized territories.

More than half of the world was not represented at the UN.

Self-determination was but a far-off dream.

Today, more than 80 former colonies have gained their independence.

Hundreds of millions of people have realized their passionate yearning for freedom.

History will give credit to the Soviet Union for the positive role it played in furthering the goals of national independence movements.

This has changed the make-up of the United Nations as well.

We have grown from 51 Member States in 1945, to 193 in 2012.

Today, we face a world again in transition - a transition like none seen since the end of decolonization.

Take the issue of race, for instance.

The question of race has moved from being framed as an apartheid question, to how to build multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, pluralistic societies.

Take another example – the climate issue.

Those who spoke about it only 20 years ago were tentative in their assessment and predictions.

Today, science tells us that climate change is one of the major challenges the international community must face.

Take the issue of democracy.

Who would have thought, even 5 years ago, that in the Arab world the quest for democracy would become the central focus of the Arab people?

Who could have imagined the strong calls for freedom, dignity and justice of all those who today are celebrating what is widely called the “Arab Spring”, and what I prefer to call the “Arab Awakening”?

So, ladies and gentlemen, you will agree with me that indeed, as the world lived a major transition immediately after World War Two, we find ourselves in 2012 also going through an historic transition, with all that it implies of challenges and of hopes.

And so, what is the UN’s role today?

What can the UN offer to respond to the challenges of our times, and how effective are we in our response?

I would submit that the United Nations’ role is more important than ever before.

In today’s Internet-driven world, where we live side-by-side with those who are oceans apart, we must act in a way that respects and embraces our shared values and collective efforts.

The UN is the expression of our common journey and –let us be frank - our mutual dependence.

It is a place where all the major problems of the world find their destination.

It is a place where all the hopes of humanity converge for a better tomorrow.

Take the world economy.

At the heart of our economic challenges are the issues of demand versus resources.

How to provide economic justice so that the world can live and progress in greater harmony?

As we speak, the gap between rich and poor is growing.

Economic growth is weak and the global economic system is fragile.

And everything is compounded by increasingly depleted natural resources.

Addressing poverty is of course key to achieving economic and social justice.

The UN provides the space for our concerted efforts to grow and to achieve justice.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) offer a blueprint for development.

The MDGs offer a policy framework agreed to by all the world's countries and leading development institutions.

Since their launch in 2000, the MDGs have galvanized never-before-seen efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest populations.

There is no doubt that important progress has been made in most MDG targets.

Take another area - world politics.

The General Assembly and the Security Council both provide the seat for major issues of living together in harmony.

The General Assembly was designed as the UN's chief representative, deliberative, and policy-making organ, as expressed in the UN Charter, and this remains so.

The Security Council is charged by the UN Charter with the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Council's responsibilities, among others, include investigating disputes which may lead to international friction; recommending action on threats to peace; taking military action against an aggressor.

The Membership and structure of the Council is well known.

But do they reflect the global realities of today?

How long can the world wait without the necessary reform of the Council?

History has shown that institutions face their most critical moments when they fail to respond to dynamic, changing environments.

Timely reform is therefore urgent, if the United Nations is to respond to 21st Century realities.

Let us move to another area of challenge - culture and diversity.

Diversity is also a characteristic of our world that we recognize and celebrate today more than ever, but which poses challenges of its own.

The historians among you here, distinguished scholars, would agree that the yearning of our diverse tribes, groups, nations, throughout history – this yearning of humanity for universal values - is as old as humankind itself.

Our desire for universal values can be traced back through the history of civilizations.

These values have, throughout time, been embraced worldwide as the foundation for overcoming our differences and bringing us together in one human community.

Because universality is not a given.

193 countries implies 193 governments.

193 national economies.

And how many historical experiences!

And how many national interests!

It is in the halls of the UN where all these traditions, languages, histories come together.

It is a challenge, but it is also a hope.

Our challenge remains the eradication of contempt and disrespect.

Our challenge remains enabling all countries to bring their vision of universality to the table.

The vibrant youth of today, and the changes offered by new communication technologies, open new horizons to all the world.

New horizons for bringing us together and nurturing hopes for justice and dignity.

I believe in that future.

It is the future that the UN should embrace; it is the future that we should all embrace.

As President of the General Assembly, I seize every opportunity to help the international community to achieve these goals.

Excellencies,
Distinguished scholars,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for allowing me to share with you these thoughts on the UN's relevance to today's world.

Call it "in defense of the UN", but I am a believer in change, and I have no hesitancy in shining a spotlight on where we need to adapt and do better.

In the case of the United Nations, I would assert that the organization remains as important, as needed, as relevant as ever before.

It requires some reform, but at its core – our common search for universality, for partnership and for a better world for all – remains strongly rooted and undoubtedly unchanged.

Thank you.