

30 September 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at a Guest Sermon at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine**

Reverend Dean Kowalski,
Dear Clergy and Congregants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel both humbled and blessed to appear before you this morning.

I would like to thank Dean Kowalski for his gracious invitation, and all of you for being here today.

It has become a tradition for the President of the UN General Assembly to speak before this Congregation. But it is not simply out of respect for tradition that I have come here.

The Book of Proverbs says “a joyful, happy heart does good like medicine; but a broken spirit dries the bones.” The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is not just a majestic place, but one where there is rejoicing in the Lord. I am happy to be amongst you, where a true spirit of brotherhood can be felt by all who walk through its doors. This house of worship is like medicine for the soul.

My Friends,

I firmly believe in the power of faith to advance the cause of peace. At the heart of His first sermon, Christ says “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

This is fundamental to His message, and to the work of the United Nations. In fact, maintaining international peace and security is the first stated purpose of the UN. The UN Charter enjoins the parties to any dispute, to seek a solution by negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or judicial settlement.

To draw the heightened attention of world leaders to these and other conflict resolution instruments written into the founding document of the United Nations, I chose as the overarching theme of the General Assembly’s work for this year’s session: bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means.

Unfortunately, we all know that the temptation to rush headlong into defiance and conflict is ever-present whether in international relations, politics, or private life.

More often than we would like to admit, we decide not to turn the other cheek. Time and again, we fail to resist the attraction of an ‘eye for an eye’ perhaps because it does not satisfy the primeval desire for retribution.

But nothing good can come from such an approach. You can’t heal your own heart by striking at another’s.

Taking up the cause of peace brings one closer to one’s faith. It is not the ruthless who shall inherit the Earth, but the meek.

Our meekness our humility is what brings us closer to God, but also to our fellow human beings. Once we recognize God’s image in ourselves, we must also recognize it in everyone else. Even in our sworn enemy.

The commandment to “love your enemy” is the moral center of Christ’s teachings. No matter what that enemy does, he is also made in the Lord’s image. And if you believe that, you believe that just like He loves you and me, God loves him, too.

My Friends,

Peace is not merely the absence of war; it is more than just a series of policies or worthy initiatives. True peace also requires reconciliation.

So that enmity and estrangement are no longer, the handshake is not sufficient the heart must soften as well, because reconciliation is first and foremost a great act of trust. It abolishes what the apostle Paul called the “barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” between both individuals and nations.

Genuine reconciliation is based on forgiveness, repentance, and contrition. It is about forsaking vengeance and starting afresh.

It is on this basis that what the Bible calls the “new beginning” becomes possible but only if all the parties are ready to take the leap of faith.

That’s why Martin Luther King, Jr. preached unceasingly about ‘coming together’ to write a ‘creative psalm of peace.’

My Friends,

I was born in a beautiful country that is no longer. Yugoslavia was viciously torn asunder in a sense, we were the final victim of the Cold War.

For much of Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 came to symbolize the start of another new era in global politics. But throughout the Balkans, 1989 represented first and foremost a missed opportunity, leading to a great tragedy. A proud victor over fascism and a founding member of the

United Nations descended into a maelstrom of civil war, scarring the landscape and all the peoples who inhabit the land.

Violence begot more violence; hatred, more hatred.

The ensuing devastation and fratricide left deep wounds in their wake.

The establishment of peace after a decade of bloodshed saw the emergence of six successors, including my country the Republic of Serbia.

I was privileged to serve it in two successive terms as foreign minister. During that time, we consolidated regional peace by reaching out to our neighbors, offering a hand of friendship and reconciliation. We also reached out to all other members of the global community, including those with which we have had bitter disagreements.

Today, our nation can proudly stand before the world again. Serbia is a democracy that has no ambition other than to advance the common interest of mankind.

My Friends,

I leave you with the words of an Early Church Father, the 4th century Saint John Chrysostom of Constantinople.

He was a true martyr of the faith, who preached the Gospel of peace and justice as much as he lived his life by it.

“God is not a god of war and fighting,” said that Holy Hierarch. “Make it so that war and fighting ceases both that which is against the Lord and that which is against your neighbor. Be at peace with all people consider with what character God saves you. [...] If we are fighting and buffeting, we are far off from God for enmities are produced by conflict, and from enmity springs remembrance of evil.”

The teachings of Chrysostom remind us that peace cannot be kept by force; it can only become truly sustainable when every party willingly accepts its provisions and fulfills them in good faith and not just when it is in their immediate interest to do. Only in this way can one be assured that, in the words of Leviticus, “no sword shall again pass through the land.”

Brining this about has been the fervent prayer of good men and women for millennia it should be for us as well. So let us humbly beseech the Lord to make the 67th General Assembly go down in history as an Assembly of peace.

Thank you.