

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS
President of the 67th Session

Address to the High-Level Meeting on the Rule of Law

24 September 2012

Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Guests,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor to welcome you to the General Assembly—the ‘chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations.’

On the eve of the General Debate, we have gathered for this historic High Level Meeting on the Rule of Law.

It is the first time that this critical issue is being thematically discussed by Heads of State and Government in our chamber. I am convinced that today’s deliberations will reaffirm our common faith in the everlasting moral pre-eminence of justice.

I would like to take this opportunity to voice my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for his leadership on this issue, and to thank all the statesmen who will participate in the debate. Also, allow me to extend my deep appreciation to our co-facilitators, the Permanent Representatives of Mexico and Denmark, for their successful efforts to achieve consensus on the Outcome Document.

The draft resolution before us reaffirms the interest of all UN Members in the establishment of fair, robust and enforceable laws.

Within States, the just application of the rule of law stands at the foundation of responsible governance.

In the international arena, it helps ensure predictability of action and legitimacy of outcomes. In the words of the text we are about to adopt, it has a “fundamental importance for political dialogue and cooperation among all States.”

International law must not be seen as a utopian aspiration that has little relevance to the conduct of world affairs. The principles and rules codified by centuries of treaties and agreements between nations should serve legitimate state interests, rather than trying to override them. By strictly adhering to the rule of law, we discourage the recourse to war. As one of the founders of the international legal tradition, Hugo Grotius, famously wrote: “once arms are taken up, all respect for the law, whether human or divine, is lost—as though by some edict, a fury had been let loose to commit every crime.”

When we observe international law, we put ourselves in the service of preventing that “fury” from being unleashed. Upon this fundamental tenet, have we built the United Nations.

Excellencies,

I believe this High-Level Meeting marks a new, landmark moment in the global peace process. I am pleased that it is taking place within the overarching theme I have chosen for the work of this session, namely: bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means.

Throughout the course of our deliberations, I believe it is critical that we not lose sight of the importance of fully respecting the equality, sovereignty and territorial integrity of UN Member States.

These are not only some of the most basic precepts of the Charter, but are, in my view, indispensable to achieving the first stated purpose of the United Nations—to maintain peace and security.

To be effective, the corpus of international law must be observed by all Member States—great and small, rich and poor alike. If our aim is to strengthen trust between nations, then the respect for accepted norms cannot be ambiguous or selective. Everyone needs to know everyone else will adhere to the same principles and rules.

Today's Outcome Document recognizes the "importance of national ownership in rule of law activities." It stands at the heart of the social contract between a state and its citizens. The broad diversity of legal traditions is brought together in the Document by acknowledging that there are "common features founded on international norms and standards."

The United Nations has been central to their establishment. As President, I will work with Member States to ensure the General Assembly sharpens its focus on the effective implementation of best practices in the rule of law.

Excellencies,

In the discussions to follow, I believe we can draw inspiration from words Montesquieu wrote long ago, that "there is no nation so powerful, as the one that obeys its laws not from principles of fear or reason, but from passion."

As President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly, it is my great hope that passion for the rule of law will prevail, thus empowering all Member States to ensure the equitable delivery of justice at home, and their full adherence to the tenets of international law abroad.

Realizing the scope of our task and the imperative of success, I am confident that we shall proceed with humble resolve—in a spirit of renewed cooperation, understanding and mutual respect—on the righteous path of peace.

Thank you for your attention.

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