



IRELAND

Statement by Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D.,
Minister for Foreign Affairs
at the

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Check against delivery

Mr President,

Sixty years ago our predecessors, having adopted the UN Charter, made sure that the United Nations immediately got down to work.

We need to act with the same urgency.

In the face of the profound challenges that confront the world – some of long standing, some new - our Heads of State and Government last week agreed on a far-reaching agenda for change. Though the Summit did not achieve all we hoped for, it was still a major step forward.

It is now time for follow-up. On Saturday, the Secretary-General proposed an accountability pact. He undertook to deliver on his obligations but said that we, the Member States, must deliver on ours. This requires real political leadership all round. I here commit Ireland to playing its part.

The United Nations has no more loyal member than Ireland. But we realise that the United Nations needs to change, just as the world around it has changed.

That has to be our focus over the next year. And what we do affects not just those in this chamber, but billions of our fellow human beings.

Development Issues

Mr President,

For the first time in its history, the human race has the capacity to end extreme poverty. The Summit has endorsed the Millennium Development Goals as the benchmarks of progress towards that objective.

Ireland will play its full part. Last week, my Prime Minister committed Ireland to reaching the 0.7% GNP target by 2012. By that year, we will be spending up to €1.5 billion euro annually. Moreover, our aid will remain completely untied, and directed towards the very poorest. Africa is, and will continue to be, the primary focus for Ireland's aid programme.

Over the past year, we have been tragically reminded of human vulnerability in the face of natural disasters. Their causes may be beyond our control, but how we react is in our own hands. Ireland will place an even stronger emphasis on emergency and humanitarian relief. In particular, we are urgently examining how to improve our capacity to deliver effective civil protection in such situations.

Peace-Building and Human Rights

Conflict resolution is a vital part of the UN's mission. But it is not enough to end a war. We must win the peace. Without coherent peace-building strategies, vulnerable countries may not escape from the cycle of violence. From the start, my country has been a leading proponent of the Peace Building Commission. Now that it has been agreed, let us work hard to get it up and running by the beginning of 2006.

Mr President,

At the Summit there was agreement on the vital principle that the international community should take action to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, when the responsible government fails to do so. I hope and pray that such eventualities will never again come to pass. But if they do we must act in a way which honours this solemn commitment. We have failed grievously in the past and must never do so again.

The Summit has committed us to strengthening the UN's human rights machinery. I strongly welcome the decision to double the budget of the High Commissioner's office. And the decision to establish a Human Rights Council was very positive. Now the General Assembly must move swiftly to flesh out its modalities and structure. It must be composed and must operate in a way which avoids the failings of the past. But the best features of the Commission on Human Rights, such as its engagement with civil society, must be retained. Ireland particularly values the work of Human Rights Defenders in calling governments to account and this must continue.

Terrorism and Nuclear Issues

Mr President

Once more we meet in the shadow of terrorism. So many recent and terrible acts remind us that no country is immune — as Ireland knows from its own long and bitter experiences. We should agree on the Comprehensive Convention on Combating Terrorism without delay during this session of the General Assembly. And all the existing specific conventions must be fully implemented, and practical co-operation made more effective.

The threat of terrorism requires a robust security response. But that response must also be intelligent, calibrated and proportionate. It must respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. And — though no cause can ever justify terrorism - the political and social conditions within which it breeds must also be addressed.

We cannot ignore the threat posed to our security by weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. Ireland was deeply disappointed at the failure of the recent NPT Review Conference. We were equally disappointed at the inability of the Summit to make any progress on this absolutely vital issue. But we cannot afford to give up hope. The logic in favour of the twin and mutually reinforcing goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation remains compelling.

I welcome what appear to be positive developments in regard to the DPRK, and salute the leadership of its neighbours and of the United States in the negotiating process.

Under the NPT, countries have every right to choose the option of civilian nuclear power. But it is essential that they do so in full accordance with the NPT and under the supervision of the IAEA. International confidence in their exclusively peaceful intent is also vital and where damaged must be rebuilt in a clear and fully verifiable way. With our other EU partners, Ireland fully supports the efforts of the EU-3 to achieve this outcome in regard to Iran.

Reform of UN Structures

We must continue to reform the structures of the UN. The need to align the Security Council with today's realities is widely acknowledged. This remains an important piece of unfinished business. We must fulfil our commitment to revitalise this Assembly. And we need to take a serious look at how the Economic and Social Council can better fulfil its role.

The Secretary-General has made clear his commitment to delivering on management reform within this organisation, as was requested by the Summit. Very substantial progress on this must be made during the coming Session.

Mr President,

I would now like to touch on some specific issues of concern.

Middle East/Iraq

The achievement of a lasting peace in the Middle East is of great importance to the entire world. Here, too, political will is the crucial ingredient. The initial difficult phase of disengagement from Israel's settlements in Gaza has taken place peacefully. The courage and commitment of Prime Minister Sharon and his government have been commendable. Much, however, remains to be done.

I welcome the determination of President Abbas and his colleagues to take full advantage of the opportunity presented by the withdrawal. They must, with our help, maintain their efforts to ensure peace, security and the rule of law. And disengagement will only truly be a success if Gaza becomes economically viable, with free trade and free movement. This is clearly in Israel's interests as well as in those of the Palestinians.

Disengagement is an important advance. It cannot be the end, but rather a step toward the full implementation of the Quartet Roadmap. With the support and assistance of the international community, both sides must press forward and renew momentum toward a permanent peace. It is also vital that, in particular on the West Bank – as my delegation has spelled out in detail on many occasions - Israel desists completely from further steps which could jeopardise the viability of a two-state solution.

The people of Iraq face appalling challenges from terrorism. Despite this, they have courageously taken steps towards the restoration of full democracy and the control of their own destiny. The final decision on the adoption of the draft Constitution now rests with the people themselves in next month's referendum. The international community must do whatever it can to ensure that the vote takes place in a democratic and peaceful way.

We have seen elsewhere that, no matter how difficult and imperfect progress may be, with political will and the support of the international community it is possible to move forward away from conflict.

The elections yesterday in Afghanistan are a further welcome milestone in its transition.

And I also commend the excellent progress being made in Aceh. I am proud that Irish soldiers are among those taking part in the Monitoring Mission being run by the EU and ASEAN.

Sadly, in Burma/Myanmar human rights and democracy continue to be denied. This is most acutely symbolised by the continued detention of the heroic Aung San Suu Kyi. The cumulative length of her detention now approaches ten years. Her ordeal is not forgotten by the people of Ireland. I urge ASEAN, in particular, to demonstrate effective regional leadership and to heighten pressure on the régime to release her and to move along the path of reform.

Africa

Mr President

As I said earlier, Ireland is particularly committed to Africa. We contribute substantially to development and conflict resolution and we will continue to increase that contribution. But external help can only do so much. In the resolution of the various political crises affecting the continent, the key requirement is, again, political leadership and vision.

We welcome the recent signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan, which now must be fully implemented. I am encouraged that, despite the tragic and untimely death of Vice-President Garang, both sides have reaffirmed their commitment to it.

However, the situation in Darfur continues to be deeply worrying. My government fully supports the African Union's mission to improve security there. We look forward to early progress in the International Criminal Court investigation into human rights violations. The Government of Sudan and the parties in Darfur must renew their efforts to conclude a comprehensive peace agreement by December, and the international community must continue to support UN-led efforts to provide humanitarian assistance.

I welcome recent progress in the Great Lakes region, in particular in Burundi, where elected representatives have shown generosity of spirit and courage. I look forward to parallel progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Ireland will contribute to support for the electoral process there.

But I am seriously concerned at the situation in Zimbabwe. The downward spiral, which above all hurts the ordinary people of that nation, must be reversed. The Zimbabwean government should start by accepting the recommendations of the Secretary General's Special Envoy.

Northern Ireland

Mr President

In the Northern Ireland peace process, it is also time for renewed leadership. There is a real prospect of the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and the sustained operation of its institutions. The British and Irish Governments are partners in this endeavour and we look for others to join us in delivering their promises.

The IRA took a major and courageous step forward in July. We now expect early movement to deliver fully, in a verified and convincing way, on its commitment to decommission. There is no room for fudge and, equally, no room for any continuation of paramilitarism or criminality.

Sinn Féin should also show leadership in moving to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland and to take their place in the governance of policing. The PSNI is showing professionalism, courage and even-handedness. The completion of the policing project would represent a profound move towards peace and political stability and I call upon Sinn Féin, in particular, to take the hard decisions needed.

Equally, leadership is needed from within the unionist community.

When the IRA's commitments are fully delivered and verified, then the way will be clear for renewed political discussions by all parties on the re-activation of the Northern Ireland institutions. The unionist parties say they are prepared to share power, when it is clear that the threat of violence has been removed once and for all. It should soon be time for them to demonstrate their good faith.

I also look to the unionist community to show determination in condemning, and doing all it can to discourage, the continuation of the appalling lawlessness which has in recent times so badly affected both loyalist communities and their vulnerable nationalist neighbours.

The need for political leadership is so urgent precisely because the prospect of decisive progress is so real and so alluring.

Mr President,

Following the summit, we have a collective responsibility to grasp the opportunity to reinvigorate the UN. If we fail, our peoples today and in the future will not judge us kindly.

Ireland gave its full backing to the Secretary-General's proposals for change, and I personally was honoured to act as his Envoy, because, like him, we recognised that the United Nations was at a fork in the road. At the summit, we chose to start down the right track, but there is a long way to travel. I pledge again that, over the year ahead, Ireland will remain at the forefront of the drive for reform and renewal.