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**“The United Nations: An Indispensable Global Instrument  
to Promote Peace, Development and Democracy”**

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WELCOMING SPEECH

by

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## ■ THE UNITED NATIONS IN A TIME OF GLOBAL CHANGE

Welcome to the Palais des Nations, the headquarters of the League of Nations -- the first intergovernmental organization -- and now the central facility of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). It is a pleasure to meet with you this morning. The United Nations and the world community are every day facing new challenges and if we are going to meet them and overcome numerous obstacles in our midst, it will take the commitment of people such as yourselves to work with us to pave the way for a secure and prosperous future for humankind. The United Nations, an organization borne from the ashes of World War II, continues to provide the best means to achieve our shared goals. Your visit here today will give you the opportunity to learn more about what we are doing here in Geneva. I encourage you to ask me and the speakers to follow any questions you might have.

Much has been said of the effects that the cold war has had on the Organization. The cold war prevented the United Nations from being utilized to its fullest potential as a centre of agreed actions. Certain policies and programmes were unduly politicized and opportunities were squandered. One should not, however, minimize or forget the crucial and constructive function that the United Nations performed as an important forum during a time of global confrontation. The first peace-keeping operations were conceived and deployed during this period. Furthermore, the United Nations was instrumental in the process of decolonization. The United Nations also provided and serviced the sites and structures at which vital arms regulation and disarmament agreements such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons were concluded. These are but a few examples.

Much has changed since the present United Nations Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, assumed his responsibilities on 1 January 1992. Five years ago, there was

a general feeling that the United Nations could do no wrong. The cold war had ended peacefully. There was a growing appreciation that a globalization of economic matters and information technologies was upon us. And there was talk of a "new world order" in which the UN was centre stage.

The last two years or so, the pendulum swung back toward the other extreme. There was an increasingly pervasive -- and I hasten to add, misplaced -- tendency to view the UN as being incapable of doing anything right. I believe that we may now be witnessing the beginning of the pendulum's movement to a more realistic place between the two extremes.

A tangible change has indeed occurred in the past five years, but the UN continues to be indispensable. The advent of the "Failed State," the extent to which dormant ethnic tensions would come to the fore, and the rise in isolationist and xenophobic tendencies had not been fully appreciated. Finding "solutions" to these political problems and humanitarian tragedies is not easy. Their magnitudes are huge and even when the political will does exist, it alone often cannot resolve matters. Furthermore, the United Nations is operating at a time of great financial uncertainty. There is a real possibility that the Organization might go bankrupt. During the height of its peace-keeping operations, it was possible to borrow from the peace-keeping budget to pay for regular-budget activities. This budgetary gimmickry was not the way anyone wanted to run business, but it is hard to tell refugees seeking food and shelter, or children in need of medical treatment, that they'll have to wait until Member States pay their dues -- which are currently in arrears of more than US\$ 2.5 billion.

The United Nations must, therefore, come to terms with the new realities. It must learn to do more with less. Painful reform measures are being implemented to make the Organization more relevant, efficient and cost-effective. We are making strides in learning how to delegate responsibility effectively, which will assume an ever greater importance.

However, burden-sharing should not be seen as an admission of failure or as simply "passing the buck." Rather, the UN must take advantage of others' abilities and form symbiotic relationships so that everyone concerned wins. In this period of financial belt-tightening, we must re-evaluate our goals and our respective resources. Cooperation and complementarity must be the order of the day if we are to succeed.

With the understanding that the UN cannot, by itself, meet all the demands thrust upon it, the Secretary-General has invited Member States, regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and members of civil society to work in concert toward meeting our goals. This is an important development and should be encouraged. The United Nations does not have a monopoly on the promotion of peace. It is everyone's business.

The end of the cold war brought in its wake a renewed vigour to the United Nations and enabled Member States to undertake numerous activities that previously had been dismissed as "wishful thinking". We must not allow present financial difficulties and temporary setbacks facing the UN in the short term to erode the momentum upon which we have made so many substantial gains. For the conditions that both permit and cause UN activities to be undertaken in the first place are of no less significance than the UN activities themselves. I submit that the cessation of the cold war is only the tip of the iceberg: for a change in the civilizational paradigm is discernable. This change is comprehensive. It encompasses not only inter-State relations, but also inter-human relations.

As the UN Secretary-General has pointed out, two major forces are affecting virtually every part of the world today. From below, fragmentation, disintegration and violence undermine the capacities of governance. From above, global trends sweep the planet with little regard for political lines. The sovereign State -- the building block of the United Nations -- must find ways of dealing with these changes in order to succeed as the

central mechanism for the progress of its people. The UN is uniquely able to help its members achieve this goal.

■ **THE RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
AND THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

The UN does not support the status quo. Rather, its task is to channel the change in a non-violent, evolutionary and democratic manner and help to minimize the deleterious effects that often accompany civilizational change.

In an effort to better perform the increasingly vital role that the UN is being asked to assume in our interdependent world, and to build on the Organization's strengths and address its weaknesses, at the behest and with the support of its Member States, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali has issued three innovative reports, which deal with peace-maintenance, disarmament and development in the post-cold war era.

Taken as a whole, these reports signal a marked change in the way the United Nations and the international community think about peace. No nation, however secure militarily or economically at the present time, can consider itself immune from destabilizing conditions elsewhere in the world. Peace promotion is no longer limited to the absence, prevention, or cessation of armed conflict and disarmament. It also requires multifaceted and coordinated development efforts based on international cooperation. The recent trend toward democratization is more than just a fad; it is the way of the future. This trend should be seen not as a denial of the past, but as an affirmation of achieving freedom, liberty and social protection, which are universal aspirations. Democracy is the best guarantee that these aspirations will be realized.

Toward these ends, the United Nations undertakes activities such as law-making,

norm-setting, and consensus-building. Convening international meetings forces governmental leaders and their bureaucracies to address difficult issues. It generates increased public and media interest that keeps the issues higher on the agenda than might otherwise have been. Grass roots organizations and other interested parties in civil society can -- and do -- use public statements and accords signed at such meetings as a means to hold governments accountable.

The thousands of policymakers, experts, and members of civil society who attend global summits and conferences return to their communities empowered with new information, greater contacts, and the chance to build upon increased public awareness of the issues. For example, ~~last week~~ last week the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Conference was held here in Geneva that brought together ministers from the 12 CIS countries plus some 50 other States in an effort to address migration problems caused by the disintegration of the former Soviet Union. Presently, representatives of the international community are attending Habitat II in Istanbul to discuss the future and ways to improve human settlements. The so-called "City Summit" in Istanbul will conclude an impressive series of global meetings that began with the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and included others held in Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing on human rights, population, social issues, and women, respectively.

Another endeavour at which the UN excels is education. It produces and disseminates an enormous amount of information and functions as a kind of centre of "know how." The UN works with, and provides analyses and recommendations to promote the ideals of the Charter and empower people -- especially the young -- to affect necessary changes in our world. An increasing number of high-ranking officials have been taking advantage of the statistical and analytical data accumulated by the UN specialized agencies, the Centre for Human Rights, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The expertise of the people within the UN system and the rich collection of published materials enable it to

serve as an information warehouse for social and economic development and as a centre of “advanced social technology.” The accumulated knowledge of UN bodies helps governments, educational institutions, and leaders within civil society to deal more effectively with their countries’ and the world’s social and economic needs. I deeply believe that there is no reason to “reinvent the wheel.” Rather, it is better to learn from other countries’ mistakes and profit from their successes. UN recommendations can serve as a type of international driver’s license that one can apply to local road conditions.

### **THE UNITED NATIONS AND PEACE-KEEPING**

With so many military and civilian personnel deployed in the field, perhaps the most visible UN efforts are its peace-keeping operations (PKOs). The first PKOs provided important confidence- and security-building measures by separating warring factions, monitoring a particular area during tense periods, and reporting objectively on political and military developments. United Nations personnel were deployed with the consent of the parties concerned and could be withdrawn at a protagonist’s request.

Today’s operations are considerably more complex and demanding. Some of the activities now undertaken include supervising democratic elections, monitoring human rights, overseeing the repatriation of refugees, disarming opposing factions, reconstructing war-damaged infrastructure, and providing humanitarian assistance. Whereas PKOs used to come about after protracted negotiations with recognized and legitimate actors, this is no longer always the case. Sometimes there are no easily-recognizable actors with whom to carry out talks. Of equal concern is that some recognized leaders are incapable of following through on their commitments. The deployment of peace-keeping troops and civilian personnel in a hostile environment at the displeasure and without the consultation of the “grateful” recipient’s leaders is another recent development.

Whereas some ten years ago there were five United Nations peace-keeping operations with fewer than 10,000 troops deployed, in the past year there were as many as 17 extant missions and more than 70,000 blue helmets. Given the tremendous costs involved in trying to keep or enforce peace -- a budget of roughly US\$ 250 million in 1987 had surpassed US\$ 3,500 million last year -- it is natural that Member States have had to make some difficult decisions in how best to use the limited resources (both human and financial) to meet demands that have far outpaced supplies. Financial constraints and the inability to deploy qualified personnel in a timely fashion have both undercut the UN's ability to be more efficient and effective. However, the nature of peace-keeping is such that while improvements are both desirable and doable -- and, indeed, many worthwhile developments have been put into place -- it will never be possible to procure every item at the cheapest price, or to ensure that every agreement is implemented faithfully and on time: Peace-keeping operations are expensive and delays are to be expected.

What must not happen is for the international community to reach the errant conclusion that peace-keeping and peace operations simply do not work. Recent successes include Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique and Namibia. Although some have taken to labelling certain UN undertakings as "failures," let there be no mistaking what would have happened had the UN not deployed in these countries: Millions of people would have perished due to war, disease and famine.

Some of the new generation of missions -- such as the ongoing civilian peace operation in Guatemala (which was given a mandate by the General Assembly and *not* the Security Council) -- include elements of peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building and are making noticeable progress. These undertakings clearly show that the UN is capable of adapting its peace operations to constantly changing realities and demands. The cost of being forced to scale down or close missions that *are* working because of financial considerations, is much greater than the relatively modest dues Member States are obligated to pay: Fewer than two-fifths of the Organization's members have fully paid

what they owe. This cannot continue.

■ **THE UNITED NATIONS AS A SYSTEM:**  
**THE ROLE OF UNOG AND GENEVA-BASED UN BODIES**

Peace-keeping operations are an important, but by no means only part of the Organization's work. Preventive diplomacy, peace-building, economic, and social issues represent the central core of UN undertakings.

From your visit to Geneva and the Palais, it will become increasingly clear that the United Nations is a system and that it is neither just the Secretariat and Security Council in New York, nor confined to peace-keeping. Although European-based, UNOG and the other UN entities based in Geneva are not Eurocentric. The Palais des Nations has been the site for recent efforts to end hostilities in the former Yugoslavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, East Timor, Georgia, Liberia, and Yemen. Furthermore, UNOG is becoming evermore active in supporting operations and conferences in Africa and the Middle East.

Of the 17 intergovernmental organizations that have entered into agreements with the Organization under Chapters IX and X of its Charter and are recognized as United Nations "specialized agencies", five have established headquarters here in Geneva: the International Labour Organisation (ILO); the International Telecommunications Union (ITU); the World Health Organization (WHO); the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO); and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). These 17 specialized agencies, together with some 20 autonomous programmes, funds, and research institutes, join the "six principal organs" (that is, the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, International Court of Justice, Secretariat, Security Council, and Trusteeship Council) to comprise the United Nations system. To fulfil their various mandates and further the Organization's continuing efforts to promote peace, development and democracy, these 40 or so distinct corporate entities have established offices and

deployed personnel throughout the world.

Geneva serves as a central hub through which many of these entities channel their operational activities, and UNOG actively works to facilitate the work of the various entities based here. UNOG's properties, which include the Palais des Nations and several additional properties and nearby buildings, serve as the headquarters for many UN bodies, including:

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights;
- Centre for Human Rights;
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development;
- Economic Commission for Europe;
- United Nations Compensation Commission;
- United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research;
- United Nations Research Institute for Social Development;
- United Nations Institute for Training and Research;
- Joint Inspection Unit.

Furthermore, numerous other UN bodies and units have established branches or liaison offices at UNOG, the largest and most active of which include:

- Department of Humanitarian Affairs;
- Department of Public Information;
- United Nations Environment Programme;
- United Nations Children's Fund;
- Centre for Disarmament Affairs;
- Disarmament Fellowship Programme.

The United Nations Office at Geneva is perhaps best known as the most active centre for conference diplomacy in the world. It is the sight of many negotiations and continues to be a centre of both multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. More than 7,000 technical meetings on disarmament, trade, human rights issues, and high-level political meetings are held at the Palais des Nations throughout the year, including many major annual conferences such as ILO's International Labour Conference, WHO's World Health

Assembly, the International Law Commission, and the Commission on Human Rights. The annual Substantive Session of the Economic and Social Council is held every second year in Geneva (with New York serving as the other host).

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) also meets here in Geneva throughout the year. The CD, established in 1979 as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, conducts its work by consensus and has a special relationship with the United Nations -- whose staff service its meetings. The CD adopts its own rules of procedure and its own agenda, taking into account the recommendations of the General Assembly, and the proposals of its members, and reports to the General Assembly annually, or more frequently, as appropriate. Presently, the Conference is busy drafting a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty known as the CTBT, which it is hoped will be completed shortly.

In keeping with the Secretary-General's recognition that, under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, regional organizations must assume a more active role in promoting the goals of the United Nations, UNOG has launched closer relations with several intergovernmental and other organizations on top of those recognized as UN specialized agencies. For example, UNOG initiated and has participated in five trilateral meetings with the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has resulted in enhanced cooperation among the OSCE and the Council and several UN bodies and organs such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the ECE. The subsequent inclusion in these meetings of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has enabled us to be even more effective. Also of note, yesterday two agreements concerning the formal sharing of information have been concluded: one between the CIS and UNOG, the other between the CIS and ECE, both of which will be beneficial for this new regional organization.

UNOG also has very close relations with the diplomatic community based in Geneva. The number of diplomatic missions accredited to UNOG continues to grow. Today there are 144 Member States that have established Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Specialized Agencies. Many of these Missions have additional ambassadors and staff to cover the work of the Conference on Disarmament and the World Trade Organization. Furthermore, seven Observer Missions -- which include intergovernmental organizations -- have also established permanent offices here.

Of course, fostering relations with the authorities of Switzerland and France, and the non-governmental communities also receives high priority.

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Suffice it to say that here in Geneva -- as with our colleagues working throughout the world -- we are actively participating in developing and implementing programmes, projects and policies designed to make our world a better place. Tremendous resourcefulness and determination are required to overcome obstacles and meet today's challenges. The UN system with its universal membership has the capacity to promote simultaneously peace, stability and well-being. Governments struggling to achieve the goals of worldwide peace, development and democracy should take fuller advantage of the Organization's experience, fora and human resources.

The United Nations cannot substitute for the commitment of individual States. Deeds must follow words if we are to achieve our goals. The very fact, however, that the United Nations is able to undertake peace-keeping and humanitarian operations speaks well of the Organization and its Member States. It exemplifies the international community's continuing transition from what we may call a "culture of confrontation" to a "culture of peace". Politics ought not to be viewed as a "zero-sum" game: We must

create “win-win” scenarios. We must become more tolerant and learn to embrace the accumulated knowledge of various cultures. We have moved beyond a desire for peaceful coexistence to a need for active teamwork. The United Nations system is in a unique position to hasten this transition and affect the desired changes.

As the Secretary-General stated in his Supplement to an Agenda for Peace,

“There is no reason for frustration or pessimism. More progress has been made in the past few years toward using the United Nations as it was designed to be used than many could ever have predicted.”

Thank you for your attention.

