

## **Leadership through Action: the United Nations in a Changing World**

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*Statement by Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky,  
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for Political Affairs  
at the Nobel Prize Winners Forum  
Moorehead, MINN, 13 December 1992*

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Mr. Vice President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I feel deeply honored to be invited to represent the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to address your important meeting today.
2. For me the subject of today's deliberations, UN leadership in a new world, is of particular concern. In most of my diplomatic and academic career I was dealing with international organizations. However, when a year ago I came to the UN to serve in the capacity of the Under-Secretary-General I was, frankly, astounded by the scale and pace of the transformation that this Organization is facing. To retain its leading position, the United Nations needs to keep up with the changes in the world and the magnitude of these changes is really comprehensive.
3. It seems to me that humankind has reached a decisive point in its development, perhaps the most important in the history of civilization. Not only has the old cold war international system collapsed, but all the basic elements of

the international structure created since the Peace of Westfalia of 1648 are fading away. The new world system is not created yet and we only have its first blueprints. This development coupled with the social and economic shifts have led to a situation in which the discrepancies - both on the national and international level - have begun to manifest themselves in powerful and often destructive processes. We are facing a choice. Either humankind will be dragged into the chaos of violence, deterioration of the environment, poverty, and continuous social unrest, or we will restructure the world economic and political systems and reconsider the basic norms of our social and political behavior. Under these circumstances, the problem of leadership in world affairs is of paramount importance. The world needs political as well as spiritual guidance to minimize the destabilizing effect of changes and to avoid the deepening of the crisis. This is precisely what the United Nations was created for.

4. For many decades the UN's leading role in international politics was merely an abstract notion. Today, for the first time, the Organization has got the chance to become the guiding and consolidating factor in international politics. I would like to stress that, in the case of the UN, the word "leadership" has a special meaning. The Organization is not a nucleus of any sort of world government, as it is sometimes depicted by mass media. The United Nations is totally dependent on its Member States and acts according to their will. On the other hand, it provides a unique instrument for its 180 members to adjust differences and to work out compromise solutions to very complicated problems. It is my firm conviction that today, as never before, the activities of the Organization are based on the balance of interests of all its Member States, both large and small, and thus reflect the interests of humankind as a whole.

5. The UN gives all its members an effective tool to influence world political developments, provided that this influence is in agreement with the universal principles of justice and the norms of international law. There are many examples to prove this point - the US leadership and initiative in sanctions against Iraq or in the operation in Somalia.

6. Trying to define the UN role in contemporary world politics I would call it leadership through action. Practically, it means: 1) early warning about threats to common security in all its aspects - political, military, social, economic and ecological; 2) initiative in the resolution of these problems; 3) guidance and control in the implementation of decisions approved by the international community. Despite all the difficulties which the Organization is now facing, it is actually performing this function.

7. A convincing example of the UN's ability to play this guiding and leading role is the work of the Security Council - the main decision-making body in the field of maintaining international peace and security - and the unprecedented degree of unity among its members. The veto of the permanent members of the Security Council had acquired a new meaning. For decades it was used for blocking the work of the Organization. Today it plays a positive role as a powerful stimulus for compromise. The Council members are very cautious in this respect, trying not to provoke others to apply the veto, so that the existing balance is preserved. Several years ago the Council usually had meetings just once or twice a month. Today its formal meetings and informal consultations take place almost every day. Its members work together in solving major international issues which earlier seemed unresolvable. The successful UN operation in Namibia and

the collective UN sanctions against Libya are just two examples. It is also worth mentioning that the fate of Kuwait was determined not in Washington, London, Moscow, Paris or Tokyo, but in New York at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council.

8. The leading role of the UN in world affairs is based on the solid legal foundation of the UN Charter. Gone are those days when the world was divided between two competing ideologies. Now there is a lot of talk about the deideologization of international relations, even about the end of ideology. I believe that the vacuum of ideas is no less dangerous than ideological warfare. The UN Charter should be strengthened and supported by a broader philosophical and ethical concept. The world needs a political philosophy, but of a new kind which would unite people and bring the feeling of solidarity, rather than divide them. The basis for such a philosophy already exists. The Ten Commandments in Judaism and Christianity, Shariah in Islam as well as ethical codes of many other religions and spiritual teachings contain sets of essentially similar rules of behavior which have eternal value and are applicable both to individuals and states.

9. It is imperative that these humanistic ideas be applied without prejudice or double standard. Aggression is always aggression regardless of what special relations the aggressor may have with any country. It is important to understand that though exemptions from the universal moral norms may offer immediate benefits to certain states, in the long run they are counterproductive and harmful to all members of the international community, including their initiators. Such violations destroy the very fabric of the international solidarity, lead to distrust and provoke others to follow the false example.

10. In many cases joint actions of states through the UN or other international bodies require consensus. This is the rule, for instance, in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The same approach is developing at the UN General Assembly. For example, this year at the 47 session of the Assembly 74% of the resolutions were adopted by consensus. However, with all due respect to this basic norm, it should not be taken to the extreme. Consensus is not applicable when it is necessary to prevent violence or when human rights are at stake.

11. The main directions of UN activities aimed at strengthening its leadership through action were set forth in two important documents recently issued at the UN. These are the reports of the Secretary-General "An Agenda for Peace" and "New dimensions of arms regulation and disarmament in the post-cold war era". As it is stressed in these documents, today UN leadership can not be limited only to the political sphere. Many pressing economic, social and ecological problems are closely interconnected with political issues. Thus, UN leadership through action needs an integrated approach. To put it in the words of the UN Charter, the World Organization should "harmonize the actions of nations" in the attainment of their common ends.

12. In international politics, which is the main field of the UN activities, the organization is primarily engaged in conflict resolution and settlement. Traditionally, two principal tools were applied to this end - preventive and enforcement measures. In a broad sense, preventive actions incorporate all the means of influence short of those envisaged in Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. Usually, four elements of preventive activities are distinguished - preventive diplomacy, peace-making, peace-keeping, and peace building. In my opinion,

today special attention should be given to peace building.

13. Peace-building, in general terms, is the creation of conditions of life that will fulfil the justified aspirations of societies and remove the underlying causes of conflict within them and between nations. When peace is sought for its own sake it will not last. The issues - economic, social, and political - which cause conflict must be addressed in the first place. This implies intensified efforts to ensure sustainable economic development, especially for the countries in greatest need. Peace-building will require concrete cooperation projects which will link different countries and contribute not only to economic development but also enhance mutual trust. For the building of peace, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the protection of minorities are of paramount importance.

14. Obviously, one of the most significant elements of peace-building is the reduction of armaments and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. The UN is making considerable efforts in this direction. Among its recent undertakings, I would like to mention the UN register of arms sales, which will promote transparency and encourage constraint in the sale and acquisition of weapons. Intensive work is being done in the field of the protection of human rights. This year the World Conference on Human Rights will bring together world leaders of the highest level. We expect this Conference to reaffirm the need for full implementation of economic, cultural and social rights together with political and civil rights and to reaffirm the link between sustainable development and human rights. UNIDO, one of the organizations of the UN system, is concentrating its activities on economic assistance to the developing countries. Peace building is the most effective tool of peace settlement, but the most difficult

to implement. To build world peace we need prolonged efforts and closely coordinated global cooperation in all aspects. To build peace we also need good will and readiness to share resources and expertise on the part of those who possess them.

15. United Nations activities are usually associated with the peace-keeping operations. They have been used for several decades and, as a rule, require plenty of time, effort, and resources. At present, the Organization is engaged in 13 peace-keeping operations in five continents. Over 53,000 authorized military personnel are serving at this moment under United Nations command. The largest of these operations are those in Cambodia and the former Yugoslavia. In Yugoslavia alone, there is a total of 15,461 military personnel plus 699 civilian policemen. With the changes in the international political environment, the nature of these operations is also beginning to change. They are now incorporating certain elements usually associated with peace building. For example, in Cambodia, the UN personnel is involved in purely civilian activities such as organizing local governments, helping to rebuild economic infrastructure, reviving the judicial system, etc.

16. Special emphasis on UN activities in peace-keeping operations has historical roots. This form of conflict management was born during the Cold War. The peace-keeping operations were not envisioned in the UN Charter. They lay somewhere in between Chapter VI of the Charter, dealing with peaceful means of settlement of disputes, and Chapter VII, authorizing the Organization to use force to restore international peace. For this reason peace-keeping operations are sometimes referred to as measures in accordance with Chapter 6 1/2. During the

Cold War, confrontation blocked the ability of the international community to take prompt action while conflicts were still in their initial stages, when still manageable by diplomatic means. Accordingly, today for the UN to retain its leadership in world affairs, it needs to strengthen its capabilities in preventive diplomacy.

17. Slowly but steadily, this tool of conflict management is developing. The mechanism of early warning about possible breaches of peace is being developed. More missions are being sent from UN Headquarters to the zones of conflicts to collect information, to mediate and to negotiate. Last year, for example, the UN undertook a total of 42 missions to various trouble spots, such as Guatemala, Nagorno-Karabakh, the former Yugoslavia, Moldova and Haiti.

18. In many instances, these missions proved very useful. In Moldova, a fact-finding mission dispatched in early July generated sufficient pressure to bring the conflicting parties to the negotiating table, and helped attain a cease fire that has been holding, even though all political problems have not been resolved. A good-will mission sent in October to the Solomon Islands as a result of its dispute with Papua New Guinea was another case in which a preventive diplomacy measure led to peace-making efforts. A good-will mission sent to Tajikistan in November was able, through its negotiations with Tajik political leaders, members of Parliament, field commanders, and regional authorities, to contribute to the convening of an Extraordinary Session of Parliament with a view to starting a process of national reconciliation, though the overall situation there remains volatile. Another mission to Tajikistan was sent in mid-January to re-assess the situation and help bring the parties to the negotiating table. Currently UN missions are working in Georgia



and Estonia. One more mission will be soon dispatched to Moldova.

19. Potentially a very powerful tool of conflict management is preventive deployment. Even a small UN contingent sent to the zone of emerging conflict can effectively prevent violence and compel the parties to begin negotiations. Today we have only one case of preventive deployment in Macedonia. At the first stage a 700 men strong Joint Nordic Infantry Battalion will be deployed in Skopje area with troops being contributed by Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Later additional servicemen will be provided by other countries. Hopefully, this new kind of preventive action will be implemented more often.

20. It is important, in addition to these political and diplomatic tools, to more actively employ legal means for the peaceful settlement of disputes, for example, arbitration. In particular, I would like to stress the potential of the international judicial bodies, such as the International Court of Justice, which remains an under-utilized tool for the peaceful adjudication of disputes. May I remind you that according to the Charter the Court is "the principle judicial organ" of the United Nations. It is worth noting that the predecessor of the United Nations, the League of Nations, had some interesting and relevant practice in this field. At times, it would set up commissions of prominent jurists to settle disputes between states. A good example was the settlement of the conflict between Sweden and Finland over the Åland islands in 1921. The conflict was caused by the demands of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland for greater autonomy or independence. Without the involvement of the League of Nations, the problem could have easily developed into an armed conflict, particularly given the important strategic value of the islands at that time.

21. The Åland settlement has some features that may be of significant value and relevance to the resolution of political conflicts in a number of places. The involvement in conflict resolution of an impartial body which bases its judgement on the norms of international law and is, presumably, immune to political or national influence has a number of obvious advantages. The most important of them is that its decision is generally easier to accept for all the parties to the conflict. Today we have an example of the Court's involvement in the management and perhaps settlement of an international dispute - the controversy between Hungary and Slovakia about the Gabčíkovo dam project. I think that there are propitious circumstances in modern international politics for a revival of these practices.

22. As for the concept of peace enforcement, it is relatively new in the UN lexicon. Peace enforcement has become the subject of studies and extensive discussions after the coercive action taken by the UN during the Gulf war. At the recent session of the General Assembly, much attention was given to the problem of enforcement in connection with the UN Charter and the proposal that the Member States should keep certain contingents of their armed forces on stand by to be used by the UN in case of emergency.

23. This notion is indeed rather controversial. Sometimes the question is raised whether in principle it is possible to use military force to bring peace. Some Member States also see a contradiction between the principle of sovereignty and the right of the UN to enforce and hence to interfere in the internal problems of a state. Indeed, respect for fundamental sovereignty and integrity of the state is crucial to any common international progress. However, in his report "An Agenda

for Peace" the Secretary-General stressed that the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty has passed; its theory was never matched by reality. Thus we need to find a proper balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an even more interdependent world.

24. However, it is generally accepted that enforcement is an essential and, in certain cases, inevitable element of collective security. The UN was granted the right to use force by Chapter VII of the UN Charter. I believe that the use of force by the UN is an exceptional measure which should be applied only when all other means of influence fail to prevent the outbreak of violence. Diplomatic tools should be always preferable to military ones. Five years of negotiations is better than five days of war. Peace enforcement is only justified when it is necessary to stop an evident aggression, like in Iraq, or to enforce a cease-fire, as it was done in Somalia.

25. UN leadership through action, presupposes close cooperation between the World Organization and different regional bodies. However, UN leadership, in my opinion, does not mean that it should be involved in the solution of each and every problem and to star in every political drama. It would be preferable for it to serve as a catalyst for action and as a dynamic supporting actor. We already have some useful examples of cooperation with regional organizations. One is the international conference on the former Yugoslavia organized jointly by the UN and the European organizations. I would also like to mention the ongoing joint UN/OAS efforts in search of a formula which would allow for the restoration of democracy in Haiti. The stronger the regional organizations, the stronger is the UN. The Organization should serve as a roof for all the regional structures. It

is already an established practice that the activities of other organizations are carefully linked to the resolutions and decisions of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly.

26. In redefining the role of regional organizations in the post-cold-war period the United Nations regional Offices in other countries, including the largest at Geneva and at Vienna, could play more important roles as a focal point of UN integrated approach to the problems of the respective region. They are able to use their comparable advantages in a number of fields, such as social and economic problems or environmental issues to create an efficient network with the regional organizations and UN specialized agencies and programs.

27. Multilateral diplomacy, of which the UN is the central piece, does not exist in a vacuum. UN leadership will only be a dream if it does not have the worldwide support not only of the governments of its Member States but also of non-governmental organizations and all those who are concerned about the future of our planet. Of particular importance is support and involvement by renowned personalities, political, religious and spiritual leaders, writers, scientists, those people who can generate new ideas and influence public opinion promoting the ideals and values of the United Nations. In some cases, a single statement by a respected spiritual leader can do much more to prevent a conflict or to save human life than any resolution or declaration.

28. Today the UN is entering a new period in its existence. The wide experience and know-how of the UN are a true guardian of international peace, stability, and security. But to do that the UN needs the support of governments and the people.

It needs your understanding and support.

Thank you for your attention.