

# **Building the Future through the Solution of the Most Pressing Problems of Today**

Statement

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Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Friends,

I am glad to have the chance to address this meeting today. This Assembly organized by the Åland Islands Peace Institute opens a very good opportunity for you to discuss the most pressing problems of current international politics. I feel that my mission here is to convey to you how the UN looks at these problems and to outline what the world Organization is doing to facilitate their solution.

## **Challenges of the New World**

1. Nowadays, it is axiom to state that we have a new political environment and a new United Nations. During the decades after World War II the UN was severely constrained by the ideological struggle and the confrontation. The threat of nuclear disaster overshadowed all other concerns. When the cold war was over, many people believed that the world would be a much better and safer place to live. The nuclear war was no longer a major threat and the UN, accordingly, was expected to take care of all the remaining problems. This, however, did not happen.

2. The collapse of the cold war international system destroyed many stereotypes, and national conflicts frozen during the years of confrontation came to the surface. Dissensions on ethnic or religious grounds sprung up all over the globe. Some States disintegrated while many others are facing strong separatist or nationalist movements and are struggling with militant extremist political groups. Combined with the worsening of the social and economic problems in many parts of the world, the rise and internationalization of organized crime and with the threat of nuclear terrorism, these led to a very complicated situation. The world entered a troublesome transitional period from an old power-oriented, authoritarian, and confrontational political system to a new system which is yet to be built. Navigating in these uncharted waters is extremely difficult and it is no surprise that many people, including some politicians feel frustrated.

3. Much expectation in the immediate aftermath of the cold war has been put on the United Nations. In this connection I would like to stress that contrary to popular belief the United Nations is not an embryo of a world government nor is it an international police force. It is the centre of agreed action of its Member States and it can do only what its Members authorize and enable it to do.

4. Today the world Organization has been put into a situation where it has to handle nearly 80 crisis situations and simultaneously run about two dozen peace-keeping operations (currently there are 17). This constitutes, however, only one third of its activities. The other two thirds consist of numerous programmes of economic and social development. The UN has to take care of the world's 20 million refugees and provide assistance to the victims of natural disasters, to set standards in the field of protection of human rights, and many other things. However, its resources remained limited. More than that, many Member States

continue to delay making contributions to the UN budget thus putting the Organization into a permanent financial crisis. As of 31 May 1995 the total arrears were \$2.75 billion - \$904 million owed to the regular budget and \$1.85 billion due to peace-keeping operations. The situation is further complicated by the obvious discrepancy between words and deeds of some Member States. For example, while on macro-level, the Member States favour peace-keeping operations, on micro-level many of them are reluctant to provide their military contingents when asked.

5. The UN Secretariat - the executive arm of the organization - reacted to this situation with the re-evaluation of its priorities, urgent restructuring, and ~~streamlining of its resources~~ *streamlining its operation and eliminating waste and re* in an attempt to do more with less. The situation is indeed critical. Still there is a hope and in fact a good chance for the UN to overcome its present difficulties. This belief is based, first of all, on the fact that the world needs the UN. The growing economic interdependence and social and cultural cross-penetration makes it imperative to maintain a mechanism for worldwide cooperation in dealing with a wide-range of global issues. Secondly, there is a favourable shift in the mentality of politicians. As in European literature of the nineteenth century, romanticism is giving way to critical realism. There is a growing understanding that the United Nations is a safety net which can minimize the damaging effect of the change. Finally, some powerful global tendencies are now at work which are favourable for the United Nations. What are they?

6. We all are used to the existence of the inter-State structure - the system of multiple, competing, and unequally powerful States - and we are taking it for granted. However, from a historic perspective this is a dynamic constantly

developing system. The role which the State plays in international politics is changing and hopefully the system of States will transform into a more equitable pattern based not on the balance of power, but on the balance of interests. As the UN Secretary-General said: "The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty has passed; its theory was never matched by reality. It is the task of leaders of States today to understand this and to find a balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an evermore interdependent world".

7. Two major factors are working in this direction. Firstly, the transnationalization of capital, growing international economic interdependence, and greater need for global economic and ecological coordination lead to the strengthening of the transnational institutions, such as the UN and other international organizations. The "new economic interdependence" as it was called in the 1970s has grown dramatically. Burgeoning cross-border flows of trade and investment, linked by 24-hour capital markets and telecommunications nets, are integrating the nations even more closely. At the same time, the global economy is expanding to include the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the newly industrializing countries. Now that national or regional barriers restricting financial flows no longer exist, and neither technology nor management and marketing techniques observe any boundaries, the key prerequisites of economic success are increasingly transferable from one country to another. As a result delocalization of industrial production has become one of the major factors of the world economy. For example, the percentage of Japanese industrial production transferred to other countries in East Asia has multiplied three times since 1980.

8. In this new context, where national and regional systems are vitally

interconnected, one crucial issue is the management of bilateral, regional, and global exchange of people, ideas, goods, and capital and regulation of other flows so that they do not conflict with one another as well as the development of the global infrastructure to support these flows. In fact, such infrastructure already exists and it was created primarily by the UN efforts. Many people are not aware that some spheres of activities such as international trade, telecommunications, air traffic or peaceful use of nuclear energy were globally regulated for many years.

9. Secondly, in the past decade there was a tremendous growth of influence of new actors which are traditionally named non-governmental organizations and are now often referred to as civil society or citizen groups. Though this phenomenon is not new, it is rather difficult to define. It is like a mosaic with an infinite number of colours and shades. It was estimated that there are now at least 500,000 NGOs in the world. Several of these organizations are large and well known - for example, the Red Cross, Greenpeace or CARE. Others are small and comprise just a few people. Some authors simply explain "civil society" as the independent institutions outside government that help people interact with government and make their will known to officials and politicians. In any case, the citizen movements tackling poverty, social inequities, human rights and the rights of minorities, pollution, resource depletion, violence and wars are the most creative, energetic forces addressing problems of our planet. Their increased efforts - a phenomenon often labelled as the new globalism - is developing on a number of levels simultaneously, and the so-called grassroots globalism is, perhaps, its most important element. These are the activities of thousands of people who are working on the local level but are keeping the fate of the planet in mind.

10. The grass roots globalism has some remarkable features. It is result-oriented, its approaches are often innovative and stress positive action and role models. The grass roots globalism often holds nations to account. For example, Amnesty International awakened the world's conscience to human-rights abuses and now protects victims worldwide by publicizing their imprisonment or abuse. Greenpeace has shown how public campaigns can prevent nuclear weapons tests, ocean dumping of toxic wastes and help save endangered species. Though some label the activists of non-governmental organizations as "troublemakers" they are now arising as influential actors on the international scene.

11. This new emerging global civil society is interlinked by electronic communication channels and by millions of newsletters, which is increasingly driving agendas of nations and corporations. At this point I would like to mention one of the subjects on the agenda of this Assembly - the role of new information technologies in democratic decisions. The development of such technologies is an integral part of the fundamental shift from industrial to post-industrial and information society in the economically more advanced countries. This shift has very important social and political consequences.

12. It appears, in particular, that the development of modern means of communication and the creation of global networks such as Internet is rendering many types of traditional political activities, both domestic and international, irrelevant. In the information age, millions of people acquired the ability to send, receive and filter vast amounts of information quickly and cheaply. Thus, citizens groups around the globe armed not with guns, but with computers, modems and Internet accounts, are increasingly able to take direct control of the issues facing their nations. In this connection I would like to mention that the

UN is also present in the Cyberspace. Many of its documents, including those related to the youth and minorities issues can be downloaded from the UN servers. Next month the UN Office at Geneva which I am supervising will also join the club with its own Internet node.

### **Vision of the Future**

13. The combination of these two trends - the strengthening of the transnational institutions and the development of the global civil society may lead to the creation of a new international system. It is not easy to draw its outline. There is an ongoing discussion within the Organization about how we should proceed. Nevertheless, the vision is presented in the reports of the UN Secretary-General "An Agenda for Peace" and "An Agenda for Development".

14. The international system of the future will be, to begin with, not only State-oriented, but also human-oriented. Basically, it is the individual human being not any other political entity who has the absolute sovereignty. Accordingly, the respect for human rights and the rights of minorities, whether ethnic, religious, social or linguistic, will be among the major priorities.

15. This will be the system where peace, development and democracy - the triad of survival formulated by the Secretary-General - will be fully implemented. As far as peace is concerned, the current modest achievements in the field of collective action on conflict prevention and resolution, as well as on arms limitation and disarmament will further develop into a cooperative system of security. This system will have three major dimensions. Firstly, it is common security which means that no State can be secure at the expense of the

other. Secondly, it is comprehensive security which covers not only traditional, military, and political, but also economical, environmental, social and humanitarian spheres. Comprehensive security implies also security at global, regional, and national levels. Thirdly, it is human security which provides for the feeling of security on the level of the individual human being. It should be noted that such a system can be created only by the joint effort of all the members of the international community. No State regardless of how powerful it is can guarantee international stability and accordingly national security on its own.

16. The heart of the new system will be economic development. Concerted efforts of the international community will ensure worldwide sustainable economic growth. This situation will allow the international community to properly address environmental issues and solve the numerous problems related to the social dimension of development. People are a country's principle asset. Their well-being defines development. Thus, in the international system of the future, primary attention will be focused on social protection, expansion of employment and achieving social integration. The nations will join their efforts to eliminate poverty, hunger, illiteracy and many other social ills.

17. This new system will be more democratic. Democracy is the basic tool for both arbitration and regulation of the many political, social, economic and ethnic tensions that constantly threaten to tear apart societies. In fact, it is one of the pillars on which a fair and effective international system must rest. Within States, democracy means a system whereby citizens can take an active part in public life. Among States, democracy means to prefer negotiation and compromise to violence. It also means that key decisions affecting the world

will be taken not by a handful of powerful countries, but with the participation of all States affected by them. Historical experience has shown that democracy is not an exclusive prerogative of certain privileged nations. It is capable of assuming different forms so as to be more consistent with the experience of respective peoples, and it can and must be assimilated by all cultures. Democratization applies not only to states but to the international organizations as well. Because of the greater role of the universal institutions there will be further development of international law and more worldwide regulation in the areas where it is needed.

18. This system will be more pluralistic and tolerant to cultural and other differences. The new democratic world structure will help to solve the old contradiction between two cardinal principles of international relations: the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. The State borders will still exist, as well as the national languages and cultures, but they will not create any obstacles for free contacts among people, trade flows or exchange of ideas. I would say that societies will be interdependent and internationalistic in substance and national in form.

19. The UN, as a sleeping beauty will be awakened from its decades long sleep and will unlock its whole potential. It will strengthen and expand its traditional functions:

- as the instrument of the Member States to work out agreed actions;
- as the organizer of the continuum of conferences to address new global issues;
- as the provider of the forum for ideas and the voice for the most deprived;

and

- as the institution for granting legitimacy for international action.

It will assume new roles which have just started to develop, such as the repository of the international experience and the source of social and economic “know-how”. This will be easy for the world Organization to do since all its Member States will understand the advantages of global cooperation.

20. In the future there will probably be no need for larger-scale peace-keeping operations because the UN will be able to avert international conflicts through preventive diplomatic actions. More than that, it will finally have the chance to concentrate its efforts on the elimination of the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice and political oppression.

21. This is the vision of the future as it is seen from the United Nations. This is not a Utopia. Many of its elements can take shape in the near future. There is only one condition for it to materialize. To build the future we need to start work today, to engage in a restless search for a solution of the most pressing problems and to know our priorities. The chain is as strong as its weakest link. Today it is the national level which requires particular attention and among the issues that are of special concern is that of minorities.

### **Minorities: The Most Pressing Problems of the Present**

22. As you are well aware the problem of national minorities is extremely complicated. In our modern world the common situation is that an overwhelming majority of States embrace a mosaic of people. In most countries

there are majorities sharing a common history and cultural background, and there are minorities - at times really small and at times rather sizeable - each with its own characteristics. Just consider this fact - in the whole world there are currently almost 190 States, 185 of them Members of the United Nations, while there are more than 5,000 identifiable minorities.

23. After the Second World War the prevailing view was that if individual human rights are properly protected there is no need for special provisions to deal with the rights of minorities. In fact, in the UN Charter minorities are not even mentioned. However, the issue of minority rights was not completely put aside. Some progress in the solution of the problem of minorities has already been achieved, and the UN is very actively involved in this work.

24. The basis of the international legal system for dealing with the minorities issues had been formed by a set of fundamental UN documents including: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Non-discrimination also features in a number of specialized international agreements, such as the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981; and the Convention against Discrimination in Education or the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice.

25. The UN Commission on Human Rights has created a special Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities which is currently the world's main multilateral body for the consideration of relevant issues. The Sub-Commission prepared a number of important reports

on the situation of the rights of minorities in different countries or regions, and investigated numerous cases of minorities' rights violations. In 1991 it adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities which was later endorsed by the UN General Assembly. Currently this is the only universal document specifically devoted to the minorities issue.

26. The Declaration, inter alia, proclaimed that States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories, and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity. According to the Declaration, persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their language freely and without interference or any form of discrimination. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate in decisions concerning the groups to which they belong, to establish their associations, and to maintain without discrimination contacts with other members of their group across State borders.

27. In recent years one of the priority issues before the Sub-Commission is that of the rights of the indigenous populations. The Sub-Commission created the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations and in December last year inaugurated the Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The UN Centre for Human Rights has finalized the preparation of the draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and is working on the creation of a Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples affiliated with the UN. In this connection I would like to remind you that the UN General Assembly at its 45th

session proclaimed 1993 as the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples, with a view to strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities such as protection from discrimination, preservation of their languages and cultural, religious and social systems and protection of their habitat. I would also like to inform you that the 9th of August every year will be observed as the International Day of Indigenous Peoples.

28. It is encouraging that with regard to the problems of minorities the UN is working hand in hand with the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in particular with its High Commissioner for National Minorities. The two organizations have developed a complementary approach which takes into account their compatible advantages.

29. Further progress with regard to the issue of minorities is currently hampered by the inadequacy of the legal background. For example, there is a lack of universally accepted definition of minority and accordingly of the proper understanding of this social phenomenon. Different criteria are applied to define the minority - the number of people belonging to it, its position in the society, differences in ethnic or national identity, culture or language. However these criteria can also be applied to groups that are normally not considered minorities such as migrant workers, refugees, or stateless persons.

30. It appears that while the international legal basis for the solution of minorities issues is still under construction, it is important to study more carefully the existing examples of successful approaches to such issues. In fact, there are plenty of them all over the world. One is the Aland Islands case. The

Aland model is indeed very impressive. Today, the Aland is a modern, well functioning, economically and culturally developed community. This is an example of true political wisdom of the ~~people~~<sup>people</sup> and its leadership. The other model which I would like to mention is ~~the situation in~~ Switzerland. With its four languages, three principle religions and a rapidly evolving economy, Switzerland may be one of the most pluralistic and diverse countries in Europe. However, since the establishment of the Federal State in 1848, internal peace and stability in Switzerland have never been seriously threatened. Perhaps, a careful study of such elements of the Swiss model as the language law, territorial principle, and the Federal Constitution can help in dealing with minorities problems elsewhere.

31. Two other problems are closely linked with the issue of the minorities - the cultural diversity and democracy - and progress in one of these fields is impossible without improvements in the others. These are, perhaps, the fields where cooperation between the UN and the NGOs is most needed and could be quite productive.

32. The right to live one's culture is among the most basic rights of life. But the forces of modernization put devastating pressure on traditional cultures. The forces of ideology in this century repeatedly sought to impose uniformity across a range of differing cultures. As a result in recent years in reaction to pressures of modernization, globalization and cross-cultural communication, an explosion of micronationalism took place. Ethnic, religious and cultural separatism threatens a return of some of the worst problems of the past: intolerance or antagonism toward other cultures; opposition to practices unlike one's own; and an inability to conduct productive dialogue across the global range of diverse

cultures. When a culture walls itself off from others, the only outcome can be sterility and antagonism.

33. Our cultures do not contain principles which can provide a mechanism for a smooth and peaceful resolution of conflict situations including those concerning minorities. Thus, it is not by accident that the UN Secretary-General, in one of his recent statements, stressed that the raison d'être of the UN is to foster the integrity of cultures which should include the culture of peace, the culture of development and the culture of democracy. The promotion of the culture of peace is one of the goals of the International Year of Tolerance proclaimed at the end of 1994 by the UN General Assembly. The year will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the principle of tolerance envisaged in the UN Charter and to mobilize public opinion, to counter and to isolate extremism, acute nationalism, and fundamentalism in all their manifestations.

34. Cultural diversity is the prerequisite of further progress with regard to the situation of minorities and it is also at the heart of democratic pluralism. As it is stressed in the report of the UN Secretary-General "An Agenda for Peace", democracy requires "a deep understanding and respect for the rights of minorities and respect for the needs of the more vulnerable groups of society". This is not only a political matter. The social stability needed for productive growth is nurtured by conditions in which people can readily express their will. For this, strong domestic institutions of participation are essential.

35. Hence, the major issues are defined and the aims clarified. Now the question is how to move from problems to solutions. It will be logical to conclude that those forces which are interested in the creation of the better future

should join their efforts.

### **Constructive Parallel Action of the UN and Private Actors**

36. The UN has a long record of cooperation with the non-governmental organizations which, as a rule, is very productive and mutually beneficial. The UN always considered the citizens groups as trusted allies. NGOs made a very significant contribution for the preparation of the World Conference on Human Rights which was convened in Vienna in June of last year, as well as subsequent world summits. In fact, it is remarkable that the citizens groups are now not simply lobbyists and witnesses on this stage, but actors in the international scene whose role is being increasingly institutionalized by successive world summits - all final declarations must now make reference to the opinions and activities of the non-governmental organizations.

37. The UN and citizens groups cooperate in a wide spectrum of fields with which the world Organization is concerned. The contribution of non-governmental organizations to the UN efforts to provide humanitarian assistance, help the refugees or the victims of natural disasters is difficult to overestimate. NGOs usually form the primary source for UN, donor and media information on the scope and extent of needs in a humanitarian emergency, as they are often the only outside presence in communities isolated by war. Some of them can deliver emergency relief more cheaply than governments. However, the UN and the NGOs need and can do more to help each other.

*In a new world*

38. The UN is open for cooperation with all NGOs and citizens groups which share its aims and principles. However, the most dynamic and creative part of

society which is of particular importance for the UN are the young people. If the youth all over the world understand and share the UN goals there is no doubt that they will be achieved.

39. In the past the United Nations was making efforts to facilitate the solution of the problems of the youth and to improve its dialogue with the organizations of the young people. In 1965 the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples. Twice - in 1977 and in 1981 the Assembly adopted resolutions aimed at improving channels of communication between the world Organization, the youth and the youth organizations. In particular, it recommended to its Member States to include youth representatives in their national delegations.

40. I would like to remind you that 1985 was proclaimed International Youth Year. This year will be the tenth anniversary and will provide a good occasion to launch global activities seeking to strengthen cooperation between the UN and the youth organizations and to facilitate the solution of the youth-related problems. Next year the General Assembly will devote a special plenary meeting to youth questions. It was also decided that the UN Secretariat will prepare a world youth programme of action towards the year 2000 and beyond. Its principle objective will be to provide a practical guide, in a global framework, for national and regional action on a long-term basis. It is expected that the non-governmental organizations, in particular youth organizations, will make a considerable contribution to this programme.

41. Concluding my remarks I would like to express hope that the discussion at this Assembly in the Åland Islands, which political status is a European

success story, will help you to better understand the current global and national problems including those related to the UN, and to define the agenda of action. In this connection two things should be kept in mind. Firstly, it is necessary to have a realistic perception of the problems the world is facing. In politics to succeed one needs to be idealistic in aims and realistic, even pragmatic in actions. There is no contradiction between realism and morality. Rather realism is a moral duty - the duty to know what we do not understand and cannot do. Secondly, today it is important not only to know what to do but to do it as quickly as possible. The contemporary international political environment, despite all its complications, provides a real opportunity for a breakthrough in creating a new democratic, peaceful and just international system based on the lofty principles of the UN Charter. If we do not move fast this chance might be lost.

Thank you for your attention.