



Statement

by

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on

The United Nations: Its Relevance in the New Century

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President Moncaster,
Distinguished Guests,
Friends,

1. In my decades of work for the United Nations, both representing my country as well as representing the organization, I have seen many faces of the world body – positive and not so positive, spirit-lifting and also frustrating, focused and determined and also confused and politicized. But the most enduring experience for me about the work of the United Nations in its nearly sixty years of existence has been its contribution to making a difference in the lives of the millions of people of this planet. That role is still continuing with all its vibrancy and dedication and that role is the essence of the work of the United Nations as it faces the new century.

2. At the outset of my presentation, let me congratulate the World Affairs Council and President Moncaster for the wonderful work they are doing involving a broad spectrum of people in exchanges on international affairs, thereby promoting understanding and commonality. I feel deeply touched by the warmth and cordiality of the Council's invitation to me to participate in a series of interactions with those who believe that it is worthwhile to attend events that focus on the role of the United Nations. My thanks also go to those organizations that joined as partners of the Council in supporting today's and tomorrow's programmes.

3. Over the years, the United Nations has been tested time and again by conflicts, humanitarian crises and poverty and deprivation, but has always risen to live up to the challenge in a determined and inclusive way playing an important and often crucial role. It has been called the **“indispensable common house of the entire human family”**. The end of the cold war and dawning of the new century have confronted us with countless new challenges and also endless opportunities that we must seize for peace, development and democracy. Today we live in a world where the balances are fragile and instabilities are close at hand. As such, our common well-being can only be guaranteed through cooperation and partnership. The speed and extent of changes in today's world underscores the absolute need for a global body as the United Nations to help the world address the complexities and challenges that we face.

4. During the last decade, the seemingly endless regional conflicts have made peace-keeping an overriding concern of the United Nations. In the process, the activities of blue-helmeted peace-keepers have emerged as the most visible presence of the world body all over the globe. Let us not forget, however, that the UN handles much more than peace and security. As a matter of fact, much of the evaluation of the work of the UN is based on its record in the resolution of such conflicts, totally oblivious of the UN's work in the economic, social and human development areas.

5. It is worth reminding us that without attracting attention, the United Nations and its family of agencies are engaged in **a continuing gigantic endeavour against enormous odds to improve every aspect of people's lives** around the world. Survival of millions of

children and their development, broad-based environmental protection, forward-looking health and medical research, eradication of poverty and grass-roots level economic development, improved agriculture and fisheries, universal primary education, family planning, emergency and disaster relief and preparedness, organized air and sea travel, peaceful uses of atomic energy, labour and workers' rights to name a few major areas of the UN's activities that touch the daily lives of millions. The UN helps people in the developing world not only to face the challenges of development but builds capacity in them to make their efforts sustainable. At the same, it is worth remembering that its norm-setting role covers such broad range of areas.

6. The **Millennium Summit of the United Nations** brought together in the year 2000 largest conglomeration of the Heads of States and Governments who showed a remarkable degree of agreement and solidarity on the principles they shared and the goals they intended to pursue to build a better world. Notwithstanding perceptual differences on the details, they essentially saw the new century as a challenge and an opportunity. In the Millennium Declaration, the world leaders vowed to stand up in support of the most vulnerable countries of the world and meet the special needs of Africa as well as to promote human development, human rights, democracy and good governance. During the last three years, the world has mobilized around the **Millennium Developments Goals** (MDGs) that were identified, with halving of extreme poverty by 2015 as the key objective.

7. In addition to being universal and impartial, the ability to adapt itself to new realities has made the UN take on the challenges of the new century in a comprehensive manner. Firstly, it has been making every effort to make the world body more participatory through greater involvement of **civil society** and **the private sector** – both at national and global levels – as real partners in development. Even the exclusive Security Council has creatively engaged civil society representatives in sharing their views about conflicts. Kofi Annan's initiative for the **Global Compact** has made the corporate sector agree to uphold the high standards and goals incorporated in the UN Charter and other international covenants.

8. An increased attention is being paid by the UN to **participatory democracy and good governance** focusing on accountability, transparency and elimination of corruption. **Human rights** in particular those of women and children are attaining increasingly higher priority in the work of the organization. The UN **electoral assistance** to scores of countries and its monitoring of the elections in many others have been and continue to be a special responsibility that the world body proactively assumed in recent years. The first part of the **World Summit on the Information Society** last year in Geneva addressed the critical issue of bridging the digital divide and its second part in Tunisia next year would operationalize the decisions taken earlier. The organisation's operational ability and the country's **preparedness to respond to emergencies**, particularly natural disasters, have increased manifold. The peace-keeping operations have been transformed in a major way to handle complexity of the situation, with built-in capacity to address the **gender and children related issues at the post-conflict process**.

9. But for the role of the UN, it would not have been possible to take into account for the first time the under-recognized and under-utilized **role of women in the peace process**. I am proud that as a result of an initiative that I had taken in the Security Council in 2000, now many of the peace negotiating tables have a place for the women and majority of the peace-keeping missions have a built-in gender-dimension in their mandates and operations. To enable the future generations to have the strength of better understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity, the UN has generated a **global movement for culture of peace** in which hundreds of non-governmental organizations and thousands of peace activists throughout the world have joined.

10. It is only the UN that could mobilize a world-wide effort through the **International Year of Microcredit** in 2005 to support microcredit programmes for the poorest for poverty reduction and their empowerment. The commendable initiative of the UN to advocate for the **most vulnerable countries** of the world and to reverse the marginalization of these countries in global attention as manifested in the creation of my Office again reiterates the relevance of the organization for the defence of the weakest and the voice-less. Which organization other than the UN could have coordinated the launch of an **consolidated international appeal** for resources to “sound the alarm on behalf of 26 million people struggling to survive ravages of war and other emergencies...”. Through such activities over the years, the UN has established its usefulness as a **practical agent of change** influencing positively the lives of millions and in adapting and adjusting to the needs and realities of the day.

11. An undeniable role and relevance of the UN in the present time is its capacity and potential ability to tackle what Secretary-General Kofi Annan calls “**the problems without borders**”. Be it terrorism or drugs, be it small arms or human trafficking, be it HIV/AIDS or SARS, be it the global warming or money-laundering, be it ageing or international migration, you need a mechanism like the UN to address complexity of these challenges. The wide-ranging partnership that you need to forge to take broad-based action can be only secured due to credibility of the world body. It is only the United Nations that could successfully prepare and lead an entity like **Timor-Leste** into a sovereign statehood. On Friday, the new Ambassador of **Cambodia** came to see me and was very enthusiastically telling me of their pride in being termed as “the baby of the UN”. **Kosovo** is another example of the special role of the UN in administering a mandated territory.

12. All said, we all know that the UN is not a perfect organization. It is composed of Member States and its actions and direction are basically shaped by the decisions of the Member States that reflect most often their national positions. Reaching decisions among 191 states is complex, and the organization must respond to the interests of countries with enormously different priorities and needs. Of course, one might say that is the way democracy works. But I feel very strongly, out of my own experience of representing a Member State, that there is an urgent need to reform the intergovernmental decision-making process in the United Nations. Secretary-General Annan has initiated bold and substantive changes through his two sets of

reform-proposals in 1997 and in 2002, but their effective implementation would hinge to a large extent on the reform of the decision-making process.

13. We need to define the threats and challenges that we are collectively facing. The High-Level Panel of the Secretary-General will be submitting its report on this specific matter on 2 December and would recommend changes that the world body needs to undertake to continue to be relevant. It is equally important, if we are to get the best out of the process of globalization, particularly for the benefit of all, that we learn to govern better together. We must update our institutions of global governance to make them more legitimate, and sharpen our tools to provide a collective response. It means giving developing nations a bigger voice in the decisions of international bodies. And it means strengthening the relationships among the United Nations and other international and regional organizations. The Secretary-General said last year that the international community had reached a fork in the road. One path is to resign ourselves to the idea that an effective multilateral system is beyond our grasp, with the potential for reversion to the kind of dangerous, anarchic world order that the United Nations was set up to improve upon. The other path, also rocky but considerably more hopeful, leads to global solidarity based on shared doctrines and commitments, and a global security architecture that has a chance of commanding the respect — and adherence — of all States.

14. In September next year, world leaders will gather in New York to review progress since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration. That meeting will be a **real opportunity** for them to unite around a shared vision of collective security, to renew and deepen their commitment to forge a global partnership for development, and to take decisions to renew the United Nations.

15. In my personal association with the application of my country, Bangladesh for membership of the United Nations and since then, my thirty years of involvement in its collaboration with the UN, I can affirm with great pride that Bangladesh's transition from a totally war-ravaged, fledgling nation in 1971 to its present respectable standing in the comity of nations has been possible mainly due to the strong support of the UN. Every aspect of Bangladesh's development reflects the stamp of the UN. In my present task, as I move from Benin to Uganda, from the Sudan to Senegal, from Laos to Mongolia, from Samoa to Fiji, getting myself acquainted with their development efforts and at the same time, advocating for the international community's support to them, I am amazed each time by the extent of the multi-dimensional support that the UN family provides to each country that makes a real difference in the lives of their peoples. **Each time my faith in multilateralism is renewed --- each time my belief in the United Nations as an organization for the people is reaffirmed.**
