

Statement at the Debate of the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

10 November 2001

President of the General Assembly;
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government;
Your Excellency, Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations;
Your Excellencies Ministers, Ambassadors and Representatives;
Distinguished Delegates:

Mr President, please accept my congratulations to you on your assumption of the stewardship of this important Assembly.

We would also wish to congratulate your predecessor, Mr Harri Holkeri, for the skilful manner in which he guided the work of the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations.

Allow me also to salute the Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, on being elected to a second term, and together with the United Nations being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2001.

This is because of the tireless work both of the Secretary-General and the United Nations to realise the ideal that we all cherish: a world in which all people can live in peace, security, freedom, equality, and justice.

Mr President As has already been noted and as we all know, this General Debate has begun later than usual. The reason for this is because two months ago, the forces of terror struck at this city, New York, the Headquarters of this Organisation as well as Washington DC, the capital city of the United States of America.

It is proper that we take advantage of this occasion once more to convey our condolences and deepest sympathy to the people and government of the United States at the immense loss of life and property imposed on them through a callous act of murder. We extend the same sympathy to all other peoples who lost their citizens as a result of the colossal outrage of September 11.

We speak here about the terrible tragedy of September 11 on behalf of our government and the people of South Africa. We speak also on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Commonwealth.

There can be no doubt but that the peoples of the world have to unite in action to defeat terrorism. There can be no hesitation among any of us in the resolve to work together to ensure that those responsible for the heinous actions of September 11 are brought to justice.

This is so not only because many nations lost their citizens on that terrible day, important as this is. It is so because terrorism has demonstrated that it has no respect for borders. It has shown in a very graphic, tragic and painful manner, as it did also in Kenya and Tanzania, that our very humanity renders all of us, without exception, into potential targets of cold-blooded murder.

Where we might have used the concept of a global village loosely in the past, on September 11 terrorism taught us the abiding lesson that we do indeed belong to a global village. None within this village will be safe unless all the villagers act together to secure and guarantee that safety. All must act to promote the safety and security of one and all on the basis of a shared responsibility born of a shared danger.

Accordingly, we have no choice but to get together in the village square to agree on the threat that confronts us all. Together, in that village square, we have to determine what we do about this commonly defined threat. This is the ineluctable conclusion we must draw from the terrorist attacks of September 11.

To guarantee world peace and security in the light of the threat posed by terrorism requires that this Organization, the United Nations, must discharge its responsibility to unite the peoples of the world to adopt an International Convention against Terrorism.

Necessarily, all of us must experience a shared sense of ownership of this Convention, precisely because the Convention would not merely be a statement of principles, but a set of injunctions or prescriptions that will be binding on all of us as states. Thus should each one of us be ready to integrate our respective sovereignties within a global human sovereignty defined and governed by all of us, with none treated as superior and another inferior.

The challenge to unite the peoples of the world to fight the common threat of terrorism brings to the fore the need to speed up the transformation of the United Nations so that it is able to respond to the global challenges we face together, in an equitable manner. This means that it needs to be efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of humanity as a whole.

September 11 emphasized the point that even as the democratic system of government is being consolidated throughout the world, even as we all work to sustain the possibility of a serious and meaningful global dialogue, there are some who are prepared to resort to force in pursuit of their goals.

Clearly, there must be a response. But what should that response be?

Immediately, it is correct that we must achieve global security cooperation so that the perpetrators of the September 11 acts of terrorism are apprehended and punished.

Correctly, the Government of the United States has emphasized that all action that is carried out must be clearly targeted against the terrorists.

It has stated that such actions, including military actions, should not degenerate into collective punishment against any people on any grounds whatsoever, including those of religion, race or ethnicity. Accordingly, it is necessary that humanitarian assistance should be extended to the people of Afghanistan. We fully agree with the approach.

The US Government has also said that these actions should be of the shortest duration possible, consistent with the objective that must be achieved. Again, we agree with this without reservation.

The call has gone out that all governments and countries should contribute whatever they can to ensure that the common effort to find and punish the terrorists responsible for September 11 meet their just deserts. We have responded positively to this call because it is timely, correct and just.

All these are important elements of what has to be done to respond to those who committed the mass murders of September 11.

But they also indicate the way forward as we consider the rules that should guide us as we confront the threat of terrorism over the longer term and beyond the critically important operations and activities focused on the events of September 11.

They put the matter firmly on our common agenda that we must also achieve global cooperation for the speedy resolution of conflict situations everywhere in the world.

In this regard, it is clear that the situation in the Middle East cries out for an urgent and lasting solution. In this context, we might recall the words of the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, when he said "too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart".

The sacrifice of the Palestinian people should not be allowed to drag on any longer. Whatever these long-suffering people might themselves think and feel, it is clear that there are some in the world who will justify their destructive rage by claiming to be frontline fighters for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Beyond this, we must act together to determine the issues that drive people to resort to force and agree on what we should do to eliminate these. At the same time, we must make the point patently clear that such determination does not in any way constitute an attempt to justify terrorism. Together we must take the firm position that no circumstances whatsoever can ever justify resort to terrorism.

The need to realize the goal of determining the matters that make for peace, together, once again underlines the need for properly representative international institutions to build the necessary global consensus.

It would seem obvious that the fundamental source of conflict in the world today is the socio-economic deprivation of billions of people across the globe, co-existing side-by-side with islands of enormous wealth and prosperity within and among countries. This necessarily breeds a deep sense of injustice, social alienation, despair and a willingness to sacrifice their lives among those who feel they have nothing to lose and everything to gain, regardless of the form of action to which they resort.

As the Durban World Conference concluded, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance remain a critical part of the practices that serve to alienate billions of people and contribute to mutual antagonisms among human beings. The international community should spare no effort to ensure that this affront to human dignity is totally eradicated.

Last year, we convened in this very hall in the historic Millennium Summit. Solemnly, and with serious intent, we adopted the Millennium Declaration. The heavy and urgent obligation we now face is to implement the programme of action spelt out in that Declaration.

This constitutes and must constitute the decisive front of struggle against terrorism.

Africa for its part has developed a New Partnership for Africa's Development, which is a product of the consciousness among the African people that they, themselves, hold the key to the continent's development, security and stability.

Africans across the continent have arrived at the correct determination that human rights, democracy, peace, stability and justice are the fundamental building blocks for a prosperous continent. Concomitantly, African countries are taking measures, jointly and severally, to improve the conditions for the much-needed investment, economic renewal and development. Naturally, the United Nations has a pivotal role to play in this regard.

As we meet here members of the WTO are engaged in critical negotiations in Doha, Qatar, hopefully to agree to a new equitable trading relationship that is fair and just. It is imperative that there is a non-discriminatory and equitable trading system that promotes sustainable development.

Soon, the Ministers of Health, the WHO and others concerned will be finalising the details relating to the Global Health Fund to deal with the major communicable diseases, including Malaria, Tuberculosis and AIDS.

The Financing for Development Conference to be held next March in Mexico will cover a range of pertinent issues such as debt relief, official development assistance, and foreign direct investment. As we all know, substantial capital flows into the developing countries are critical in the struggle to defeat poverty and underdevelopment.

All these constitute vital component parts of what must inform the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002. We are confident that the Summit will reach positive conclusions that will include firm global, regional and national commitments to the elaboration, integration and implementation of economically efficient, socially responsible and environmentally sound development policies.

Mr President, There is no doubt that our global village has the resources and capacity to meet the needs of all its citizens. What is needed is the collective will of the international community to act decisively to meet this challenge, inspired by a sense of human solidarity.

Peace and security for all, freedom and democracy for all, prosperity for all and genuine equality in conditions of diversity must surely be the outcomes towards which the United Nations and all of us must strive. Our actions must affirm the seriousness of our intent.

Thank you