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President Addresses United Nations High-Level Plenary Meeting

United Nations Headquarters
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President's Remarks

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THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: Thank you for the privilege of being here for the 60th anniversary of the United Nations. Thank you for your dedication to the vital work and great ideals of this institution.

We meet at a time of great challenge for America and the world. At this moment, men and women along my country's Gulf Coast are recovering from one of the worst natural disasters in American history. Many have lost homes, and loved ones, and all their earthly possessions. In Alabama and Mississippi and Louisiana, whole neighborhoods have been lifted from their foundations and sent crashing into the streets. A great American city is working to turn the flood waters and reclaim its future.

We have witnessed the awesome power of nature -- and the greater power of human compassion. Americans have responded to their neighbors in need, and so have many of the nations represented in this chamber. All together, more than 115 countries and nearly a dozen international organizations have stepped forward with offers of assistance. To every nation, every province, and every community across the world that is standing with the American people in this hour of need, I offer the thanks of my nation.

Your response, like the response to last year's tsunami, has shown once again that the world is more compassionate and hopeful when we act together. This truth was the inspiration for the United Nations. The U.N.'s founding members laid out great and honorable goals in the charter they drafted six decades ago. That document commits this organization to work to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights," and "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom." We remain committed to those noble ideals. As we respond to great humanitarian needs, we must actively respond to the other great challenges of our time. We must continue to work to ease suffering, and to spread freedom, and to lay the foundations of lasting peace for our children and grandchildren.

In this young century, the far corners of the world are linked more closely than ever before -- and no nation can remain isolated and indifferent to the struggles of others. When a country, or a region is filled with despair, and resentment and vulnerable to violent and aggressive ideologies, the threat passes easily across oceans and borders, and could threaten the security of any peaceful country.

Terrorism fed by anger and despair has come to Tunisia, to Indonesia, to Kenya, to Tanzania, to Morocco, to Israel, to Saudi Arabia, to the United States, to Turkey, to Spain, to Russia, to Egypt, to Iraq, and the United Kingdom. And those who have not seen attacks on their own soil have still shared in the sorrow -- from Australians killed in Bali, to Italians killed in Egypt, to the citizens of dozens of nations who were killed on September the 11th, 2001, here in the city where we meet. The lesson is clear: There can be no safety in looking away, or seeking the quiet life by ignoring the hardship and oppression of others. Either hope will spread, or violence will spread -- and we must take the side of hope.

Sometimes our security will require confronting threats directly, and so a great coalition of nations has come together to fight the terrorists across the world. We've worked together to help break up terrorist networks that cross borders, and rout out radical cells within our own borders. We've eliminated terrorist sanctuaries. We're using our diplomatic and financial tools to cut off their financing and drain them of support. And as we fight, the terrorists must know that the world stands united against them. We must complete the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism that will put every nation on record: The targeting and deliberate killing by terrorists of civilians and non-combatants cannot be justified or legitimized by any cause or grievance.

And the world's free nations are determined to stop the terrorists and their allies from acquiring the terrible weapons that would allow them to kill on a scale equal to their hatred. For that reason, more than 60 countries are supporting the Proliferation Security Initiative to intercept shipments of weapons of mass destruction on land, on sea, and in air. The terrorists must know that wherever they go, they cannot escape justice.

Later today, the Security Council has an opportunity to put the terrorists on notice when it votes on a resolution that condemns the incitement of terrorist acts -- the resolution that calls upon all states to take appropriate steps to end such incitement. We also need to sign and implement the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, so that all those who seek radioactive materials or nuclear devices are prosecuted and extradited, wherever they are. We must send a clear message to the rulers of outlaw regimes that sponsor terror and pursue weapons of mass murder: You will not be allowed to threaten the peace and stability of the world.

Confronting our enemies is essential, and so civilized nations will continue to take the fight to the terrorists. Yet we know that this war will not be won by force of arms alone. We must defeat the terrorists on the battlefield, and we must also defeat them in the battle of ideas. We must change the conditions that allow terrorists to flourish and recruit, by spreading the hope of freedom to millions who've never known it. We must help raise up the failing states and stagnant societies that provide fertile ground for the terrorists. We must defend and extend a vision of human dignity, and opportunity, and prosperity -- a vision far stronger than the dark appeal of resentment and murder.

To spread a vision of hope, the United States is determined to help nations that are struggling with poverty. We are committed to the Millennium Development goals. This is an ambitious agenda that includes cutting poverty and hunger in half, ensuring that every boy and girl in the world has access to primary education, and halting the spread of AIDS -- all by 2015.

We have a moral obligation to help others -- and a moral duty to make sure our actions are effective. At Monterrey in 2002, we agreed to a new vision for the way we fight poverty, and curb corruption, and provide aid in this new millennium. Developing countries agreed to take responsibility for their own economic progress through good governance and sound policies and the rule of law. Developed countries agreed to support those efforts,

including increased aid to nations that undertake necessary reforms. My own country has sought to implement the Monterrey Consensus by establishing the new Millennium Challenge Account. This account is increasing U.S. aid for countries that govern justly, invest in their people, and promote economic freedom.

More needs to be done. I call on all the world's nations to implement the Monterrey Consensus. Implementing the Monterrey Consensus means continuing on the long, hard road to reform. Implementing the Monterrey Consensus means creating a genuine partnership between developed and developing countries to replace the donor-client relationship of the past. And implementing the Monterrey Consensus means welcoming all developing countries as full participants to the global economy, with all the requisite benefits and responsibilities.

Tying aid to reform is essential to eliminating poverty, but our work doesn't end there. For many countries, AIDS, malaria, and other diseases are both humanitarian tragedies and significant obstacles to development. We must give poor countries access to the emergency lifesaving drugs they need to fight these infectious epidemics. Through our bilateral programs and the Global Fund, the United States will continue to lead the world in providing the resources to defeat the plague of HIV-AIDS.

Today America is working with local authorities and organizations in the largest initiative in history to combat a specific disease. Across Africa, we're helping local health officials expand AIDS testing facilities, train and support doctors and nurses and counselors, and upgrade clinics and hospitals. Working with our African partners, we have now delivered lifesaving treatment to more than 230,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa. We are ahead of schedule to meet an important objective: providing HIV-AIDS treatment for nearly two million adults and children in Africa. At the G-8 Summit at Gleneagles, Scotland, we set a clear goal: an AIDS-free generation in Africa. And I challenge every member of the United Nations to take concrete steps to achieve that goal.

We're also working to fight malaria. This preventable disease kills more than a million people around the world every year -- and leaves poverty and grief in every land it touches. The United States has set a goal of cutting the malaria death rate in half in at least 15 highly endemic African countries. To achieve that goal, we've pledged to increase our funding for malaria treatment and prevention by more than \$1.2 billion over the next five years. We invite other nations to join us in this effort by committing specific aid to the dozens of other African nations in need of it. Together we can fight malaria and save hundreds of thousands of lives, and bring new hope to countries that have been devastated by this terrible disease.

As we strengthen our commitments to fighting malaria and AIDS, we must also remain on the offensive against new threats to public health such as the Avian Influenza. If left unchallenged, this virus could become the first pandemic of the 21st century. We must not allow that to happen. Today I am announcing a new International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza. The Partnership requires countries that face an outbreak to immediately share information and provide samples to the World Health Organization. By requiring transparency, we can respond more rapidly to dangerous outbreaks and stop them on time. Many nations have already joined this partnership; we invite all nations to participate. It's essential we work together, and as we do so, we will fulfill a moral duty to protect our citizens, and heal the sick, and comfort the afflicted.

Even with increased aid to fight disease and reform economies, many nations are held back by another heavy challenge: the burden of debt. So America and many nations have also acted to lift this burden that limits the growth of developing economies, and holds millions of people in poverty. Today poor countries with the heaviest debt burdens are receiving more than \$30 billion in debt relief. And to prevent the build-up of future debt, my country and other nations have agreed that international financial institutions should increasingly provide new aid in the form of grants, rather than loans. The G-8 agreed at Gleneagles to go further. To break the lend-and-forgive cycle permanently, we agreed to cancel 100 percent of the debt for the world's most heavily indebted nations. I call upon the World Bank and the IMF to finalize this historic agreement as soon as possible.

We will fight to lift the burden of poverty from places of suffering -- not just for the moment, but permanently. And the surest path to greater wealth is greater trade. In a letter he wrote to me in August, the Secretary General commended the G-8's work, but told me that aid and debt relief are not enough. The Secretary General said that we also need to reduce trade barriers and subsidies that are holding developing countries back. I agree with the Secretary General: The Doha Round is "the most promising way" to achieve this goal.

A successful Doha Round will reduce and eliminate tariffs and other barriers on farm and industrial goods. It will end unfair agricultural subsidies. It will open up global markets for services. Under Doha, every nation will gain, and the developing world stands to gain the most. Historically, developing nations that open themselves up to trade grow at several times the rate of other countries. The elimination of trade barriers could lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty over the next 15 years. The stakes are high. The lives and futures of millions of the world's poorest citizens hang in the balance -- and so we must bring the Doha trade talks to a successful conclusion.

Doha is an important step toward a larger goal: We must tear down the walls that separate the developed and developing worlds. We need to give the citizens of the poorest nations the same ability to access the world economy that the people of wealthy nations have, so they can offer their goods and talents on the world market alongside everyone else. We need to ensure that they have the same opportunities to pursue their dreams, provide for their families, and live lives of dignity and self-reliance.

And the greatest obstacles to achieving these goals are the tariffs and subsidies and barriers that isolate people of developing nations from the great opportunities of the 21st century. Today, I reiterate the challenge I have made before: We must work together in the Doha negotiations to eliminate agricultural subsidies that distort trade and stunt development, and to eliminate tariffs and other barriers to open markets for farmers around the world. Today I broaden the challenge by making this pledge: The United States is ready to eliminate all tariffs, subsidies and other barriers to free flow of goods and services as other nations do the same. This is key to overcoming poverty in the world's poorest nations. It's essential we promote prosperity and opportunity for all nations.

By expanding trade, we spread hope and opportunity to the corners of the world, and we strike a blow against the terrorists who feed on anger and resentment. Our agenda for freer trade is part of our agenda for a freer world, where people can live and worship and raise their children as they choose. In the long run, the best way to protect the religious freedom, and the rights of women and minorities, is through institutions of self-rule, which allow people to assert and defend their own rights. All who stand for human rights must also stand for human freedom.

This is a moment of great opportunity in the cause of freedom. Across the world, hearts and minds are opening to the message of human liberty as never before. In the last two years alone, tens of millions have voted in free elections in Afghanistan and Iraq, in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, in Kyrgyzstan, in Ukraine, and Georgia. And as they claim their freedom, they are inspiring millions more across the broader Middle East. We must encourage their aspirations. We must nurture freedom's progress. And the United Nations has a vital role to play.

Through the new U.N. Democracy Fund, the democratic members of the U.N. will work to help others who want to join the democratic world. It is fitting that the world's largest democracy, India, has taken a leadership role in this effort, pledging \$10 million to get the fund started. Every free nation has an interest in the success of this fund -- and every free nation has a responsibility in advancing the cause of liberty.

The work of democracy is larger than holding a fair election; it requires building the institutions that sustain freedom. Democracy takes different forms in different cultures, yet all free societies have certain things in common. Democratic nations uphold the rule of law, impose limits on the power of the state, treat women and minorities as full citizens. Democratic nations protect private property, free speech and religious expression. Democratic nations grow in strength because they reward and respect the creative gifts of their people. And democratic nations contribute to peace and stability because they seek national greatness in the achievements of their citizens, not the conquest of their neighbors.

For these reasons, the whole world has a vital interest in the success of a free Iraq -- and no civilized nation has an interest in seeing a new terror state emerge in that country. So the free world is working together to help the Iraqi people to establish a new nation that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. It's an exciting opportunity for all of us in this chamber. And the United Nations has played a vital role in the success of the January elections, where eight and a half million Iraqis defied the terrorists and cast their ballots. And since then, the United Nations has supported Iraq's elected leaders as they drafted a new constitution.

The United Nations and its member states must continue to stand by the Iraqi people as they complete the journey to a fully constitutional government. And when Iraqis complete their journey, their success will inspire others to claim their freedom, the Middle East will grow in peace and hope and liberty, and all of us will live in a safer world.

The advance of freedom and security is the calling of our time. It is the mission of the United Nations. The United Nations was created to spread the hope of liberty, and to fight poverty and disease, and to help secure human rights and human dignity for all the world's people. To help make these promises real, the United Nations must be strong and efficient, free of corruption, and accountable to the people it serves. The United Nations must stand for integrity, and live by the high standards it sets for others. And meaningful institutional reforms must include measures to improve internal oversight, identify cost savings, and ensure that precious resources are used for their intended purpose.

The United Nations has taken the first steps toward reform. The process will continue in the General Assembly this fall, and the United States will join with others to lead the effort. And the process of reform begins with members taking our responsibilities seriously. When this great institution's member states choose notorious abusers of human rights to sit on the U.N. Human Rights Commission, they discredit a noble effort, and undermine the credibility of the whole organization. If member countries want the United Nations to be respected -- respected and effective, they should begin by making sure it is worthy of respect.

At the start of a new century, the world needs the United Nations to live up to its ideals and fulfill its mission. The founding members of this organization knew that the security of the world would increasingly depend on advancing the rights of mankind, and this would require the work of many hands. After committing America to the idea of the U.N. in 1945, President Franklin Roosevelt declared: "The structure of world peace cannot be the work of one man, or one party, or one nation." Peace is the responsibility of every nation and every generation.

In each era of history, the human spirit has been challenged by the forces of darkness and chaos. Some challenges are the acts of nature; others are the works of men. This organization was convened to meet these challenges by harnessing the best instincts of humankind, the strength of the world united in common purpose. With courage and conscience, we will meet our responsibilities to protect the lives and rights of others. And when we do, we will help fulfill the promise of the United Nations, and ensure that every human being enjoys the peace and the freedom and the dignity our Creator intended for all.

Thank you. (Applause.)

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