



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ADDRESS

BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. ERNST WALCH
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

TO THE FIFTY-NINTH SESSION
OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

The United Nations faces unprecedented challenges: The recent past has brought about a worrisome erosion of the standing and credibility this great organization has enjoyed worldwide. Use of military force without prior authorization by the Security Council and increasingly difficult and dangerous conditions under which United Nations personnel operate in many places are but two examples illustrating this trend. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has given a two-tiered response: First, he issued a call for an unequivocal commitment to the principle of multilateralism, upon which this organization is built. Second, he commissioned a report from eminent and highly experienced personalities on how the organization should address new threats and challenges.

Mr. President

Liechtenstein believes that this was the right response. An unequivocal and unwavering commitment from all of us is the basis for collective action and for observing the rules we have set for ourselves. Only this commitment can give meaning to our decisions to tackle new challenges, and only this can enable us to further develop the rules-based framework in order to look confidently into the future. We must acknowledge the fact that the challenges we are facing today were not foreseeable when the founding fathers agreed on the terms which guide the work of this organization. At the same time, we always have to recognize the Charter of the United Nations as

the unique achievement that it is and first to look at our current ways of making use of this great tool that was passed on to us. It is therefore our obligation to conduct an in-depth and sober analysis of these new challenges, in order to make an informed decision how best to address them within the framework of the United Nations system. Changes and creative approaches will be needed. We therefore very much look forward to receiving and considering the report of the High-Level Panel established by the Secretary-General. However insightful their findings, however visionary their recommendations – and we have high hopes that they will be – the necessary decisions to expand the existing multilateral architecture will have to be made by us, the States gathered in this Assembly on the wake of the 60th anniversary of the United Nations.

Mr. President

In a globalized world, collective action is the necessary response to a great number of challenges. Effective measures in numerous areas – the environment, HIV/AIDS, poverty-reduction, the fight against terrorism to name but a few – can only be taken on the basis of genuine and efficient global cooperation. Such cooperation can only be successful if it is based on a set of transparent and clear rules applied in the same manner to everybody who participates in it. International law is clearly the primary instrument in this respect. However, we have witnessed contradictory tendencies in the area of international law, especially in the recent past.

On the positive side, there have been landmark achievements, most notably the establishment of the International Criminal Court: For the first time in the history of mankind, there is an independent Court, based on a Statute negotiated by the international community at a Diplomatic Conference, that

has the competence to try individuals responsible for the worst crimes, when States themselves fail to do so. We are sadly reminded every day how much such an institution is needed. On the negative side, we have observed a dangerous erosion in the application of long-standing international law standards, most notably in the field of international human rights and international humanitarian law. The stage we have reached is critical, and there can only be one response: We must urgently reverse this trend and uphold the primacy of the rule of law - both nationally and internationally.

Mr. President

We firmly believe that the rule of law is an indispensable element of sound domestic policies, often referred to as good governance, and an indispensable part of sustainable development worldwide. International organizations including the United Nations are called upon to continue their efforts to assist States in establishing and applying the rule of law. We strongly support the efforts taken over the past year to strengthen the role of the United Nations in this respect. This rule of law at the domestic level must be complemented at the international level: Through full and unconditional respect for internationally recognized standards and transparent and fair rules in international decision-making. We have been very slow in dealing with the changes in the world and its consequences, most notably with regard to non-State actors who fall outside the framework of international law as we have known it in the past. We must ensure that all those individuals and groups that play a significant role in the international arena are not allowed to move in a legal vacuum and clarify which rules apply to them. This, however, we can only do credibly and thus effectively, if we, the Governments representing States, continue to respect the standards we have created for ourselves.

The one body that is particularly called upon in this respect is the Security Council, to many the epitome of the United Nations as a whole. The Council must meticulously observe the mandate given to it under the Charter of the United Nations and ensure transparency and clarity in its decision-making. This is of special importance where the Council's decisions directly affect the rights and obligations of individuals who are not entitled to individual legal remedies - a situation which can be difficult to reconcile with the rule of law.

Mr. President

A strong momentum is gathering for reform of the Security Council, after more than ten years of deliberations on this very complex topic. In light of the challenges before the Council and the open questions concerning its role, in particular with regard to increasing legislative activities, a successful reform must address all aspects. Enlargement to make this body more modern and representative is one such aspect: We believe that it is not sound for a universal organization to have its major decisions in a truly vital area taken by only a handful of States. Furthermore, the working methods of the Council, its accountability to the membership as a whole and its mandate must also be addressed. Liechtenstein and its delegation in New York in particular will continue to stand ready to make its contribution to this end.

Mr. President

In accordance with the Charter, the Council acts on behalf of the entire membership in carrying out its duties, and its decisions are binding on all Member States. All States should therefore take a strong interest in its work

and make use of their opportunities to interact with and express their views to the Council, whether they are Members or not. More openness and inclusiveness of the Security Council is still both desirable and feasible. The question remains, however: Is the Security Council too powerful or do we simply lack the necessary system of checks and balances? We support a dynamic and strong Security Council and therefore tend to the latter view, with a clear focus on an enhanced role for the General Assembly, the only universal organ of the United Nations. The measures on revitalization upon which we have been able to agree during the last session show us how far we still have to go. It must be our goal to make this Assembly an efficient and effective body that can act and react quickly and with resolve. We are still very far away from that goal. The momentum gathered over the past year must be translated into further bold measures and trigger a process that is not reversible. This is no time for complacency and no time for indifference. This Assembly has historical tasks before it. It must leave lethargy and short-term national interests behind, in the interest of the greater good. Secretary-General Kofi Annan put this very aptly in his speech this past Tuesday: "If we cannot reach agreement on the way forward, history will make the decisions for us."

We must set a vision for the future and live up to our responsibility. We owe this to all future generations and to ourselves.

I thank you.