

PEOPLE AT THE CENTER OF OUR UNITED NATIONS

Statement by H. E. Dr. ALBERTO G. ROMULO
Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines
General Debate, 59th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
27 September 2004, New York

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Your Excellency, as you ably and wisely lead us in our 59th Session. Allow me also to take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Julian R. Hunte of St. Lucia, for his successful stewardship of our 58th Session.

A Changed World

Mr. President, the world has changed many times over, since first our hopes and aspirations were enshrined in our Charter, almost sixty years ago.

What has not changed and remains unaltered is our cowars World

Today, newer forms of political, economic and social divisions directly threaten our people and the values and dreams they hold dear. These threats hold the potential of overwhelming the gains of our organization and of dividing our peoples.

Reforms for a Changed World

All these give rise to a clamor for decisive reform in the United Nations.

We should start with the basic : reforms in the structures and relationships that define powers and responsibilities. For our Organization, this means pursuing earnest reforms in the Security Council, in the General Assembly, our subsidiary organs and the Secretariat.

But, addressing that which is the most basic is also the most difficult.

Any planned reform of the United Nations should be backed by the consensus of all 191 member states. Any reform in the Security Council should give due consideration to the views of the five Permanent Members, as they will have the final say on the matter.

Any reform should also recognize that a country like Japan deserves to be considered for a seat as a permanent member.

This changed world also demands that we reform the way we think about what can and cannot be done within our organization. We must put all our creative energies to work and spare no effort or ignore any avenue or opportunity in bringing greater peace and progress to the people.

Religion and religious leaders have a role to play in fostering tolerance and better understanding among peoples. They bring unique perspectives to the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

To complement inter-faith dialogue, dialogues between the peoples of different civilizations should also be encouraged. Deep and historic divisions can be healed through a dialogue between the peoples of different civilizations.

The Philippines will work with like-minded delegations to harness the potentials of the religious sector in realizing the objectives of our Charter. We will support efforts to broaden the dialogue among civilizations.

Our peoples' differences, be they of belief or culture, should never be the basis for misunderstanding or conflict.

But most of all, reform must begin by placing, first and foremost, the welfare and interests of the peoples of the world.

A World Full of Challenges

In the fifteen minutes that it takes for us to deliver our remarks, 60 people will have died of tuberculosis. By the time the curtains fall on a Broadway show, 250 persons, mostly women and children, will have been trafficked into forced servitude or prostitution. When we wake up tomorrow morning, 3,000 children will have died of malaria; and for lack of clean water, another 6,000 children will have perished.

Instead of schoolbooks in their hands, over 300,000 children in conflict areas have their fingers on the triggers of automatic rifles.

HIV/AIDS kills three million people a year; millions of refugees crowd camps. One-fifth of the world's population still live in abject poverty, barely subsisting on less than the price of the newspaper sold around the corner.

Terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the massive proliferation of small arms, directly threaten the people, their livelihood and are assaults on their dignity.

Critical flashpoints, most of which are in my part of the world, - the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Straits, the South China Sea, South Asia, the Middle East - hold the potential for armed conflict that would certainly place people and their futures at grave risk.

Renewed Faith in Our United Nations

As a founding member of the United Nations and as a current member of the Security Council, the Philippines reposes its faith in the Organization for the maintenance of international peace and security, the promotion of social progress and better standards of life, and the protection of the fundamental rights of individuals.

People antedated the evolution of statehood. Statehood evolved to cater to their needs - to protect their lives, to generate livelihood and to allow them to cherish their fundamental faith in their human dignity.

In placing people at the center of the United Nations, let me highlight the need to protect their lives, the importance of ensuring their livelihood and promoting their dignity.

Protecting Lives

We must allow our peoples to live free from fear, to live in a safe and secure world. Terrorism not only poses a serious threat to the lives of our people, but also to the values and ideals that define their society. Terrorism reduces people to mere pawns in a ruthless game of competing beliefs and ideologies.

The rubble in Jakarta has been cleared. Flowers cover the little graves in Beslan. But the enemy of all peoples hide in the shadows, conspiring and plotting, with evil in their hearts and the blood of innocents on their hands.

The Philippines condemns all forms of terrorism. No cause or dogma can ever justify its use.

Long before September 11, the Philippines and its people had been suffering from this scourge. We have seen the face of terror and felt its deadly touch. We were among the first in our region to join the international war against terror.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo believes a new kind of peace has to be developed for a new kind of war waged by terrorists. She proposes a new global alliance to alleviate poverty and remove it as a breeding ground for resentment and conflict.

An alliance that would demand accountability from those nations that benefit; discarding the old formula of handouts to the have-nots, but rather a hand-up for self-reliance.

The Philippines believes that conflicts should be addressed before terrorism can begin to define or exploit the conflict. This can be done by working together with other nations.

With the help of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, violent secessionism has given way to peaceful autonomy in Southern Philippines. The potential for terrorists to breed has been drastically reduced.

In partnership with Malaysia, we are closer to a negotiated peace with remaining secessionists, who themselves have renounced terror.

With Norway as a facilitator, prospects remain for peace talks with one of the world's few remaining communist rebels groups. The violent acts and disregard for human life of this communist rebels have brought them recognition as foreign terrorist organizations from dozens of countries.

Providing Livelihood to the People

Another important dimension of human security is economic. At the national level, economic security primarily means providing livelihood for the people. In the Philippines, President Arroyo has enshrined this goal in her 10-point program of action for 2004-2010.

The program calls for the creation of six million jobs in six years. This will be achieved by giving more opportunities to entrepreneurs, tripling the amount of loans to small and medium enterprises, and the development of one to two million hectares of land for agricultural business, among other strategies.

The international community should also accord job generation as a priority goal in international economic cooperation, if we are to sustain economic security. The international norms, procedures and policies we adopt in our resolutions should further support and reflect this basic aspiration.

The General Assembly should look more closely at innovative tools that will help spur economic growth, particularly in developing countries. Greater attention should be focused on how micro-credit or micro-finance, an area where the Philippines registered significant strides, could serve as an instrument to alleviating the conditions of the poorest of the poor.

Creative ways to solve the lingering debt issue and the spiraling cost of energy, especially of oil, of the developing world should also be addressed. We need to ease the burden of debt servicing and channel those meager resources to where they are needed most.

Sub-Saharan Africa pays \$10 billion every year in debt service - four times as much money as the countries in the region spend on health care and education.

Each day, developing countries pay the rich nations \$717 million in debt service. Every baby born in the developing world owes \$482 at birth.

Moreover, wise mobilization of domestic resources, like remittances for development, should also be carefully studied. Remittances by migrants, much greater than the total amount of overseas development assistance, alleviate poverty of the family members remaining in the country of origin.

As a matter of priority policy, the Philippines maintains links with its nationals abroad – giving them the right to property, to vote in national elections, the privilege of dual citizenship, and a reintegration program for returning overseas Filipino workers.

Economic security prospers when the playing field is level for both developed and developing countries. Leveling the economic playing field ensures that the fruits of globalization will benefit the people in terms of better opportunities, more jobs and improved livelihood.

International trade, investment and development are crucial tools toward raising the people's standard of living. But the people of poor countries persistently face persistent barrier against their products from the developing world.

These barriers exist despite the strictures of the international trading system emphasizing the need for an open, rule-based multilateral trading system.

Another stark reality arising from this uneven playing field is the economic cost to the developing world in terms of job generation and the amount of food available to the people.

Economic crisis in developing countries bring immediate threats to human security. When people do not know when their next meal will come from or when their crops fail, human security is compromised.

In an interlinked global economy, crises spread rapidly. Prevention and mitigation of such crises in developing countries also enhance human security in developed countries.

A World Bank study in 2002 shows for instance, that the full elimination of agricultural subsidies in rich countries would increase rural income in low and medium-income countries by about US\$60 billion a year. This is equivalent to six percent more than total worldwide aid.

Needless to say, international trade policy deserves to be fair not only to farmers of the developed world, but also to their counterparts in the developing countries. Substantial reduction of agricultural subsidies for farmers in rich countries, as a start, would go a long way in helping their fellow agricultural workers across their borders.

There is also a need for developed countries to implement their commitments to allocate 0.7 percent of their GNP for Official Development Assistance. As of last year, only five developed countries have met this commitment. Again, ODA, whether dispensed bilaterally or multilaterally, either through governments or non-governmental institutions, is an instrument to help people help themselves – a social responsibility more pronounced now in an era of increasing globalization.

Promoting the Human Dignity

The inexorable pace of globalization fuels new phenomena and drives new challenges to human security. The fluidity of capital, technology, culture, and even people, should be acknowledged as inherent in globalization. They should be harnessed for the good of the people.

Democracy and freedom, central elements to ensuring the rights of the people, should be encouraged and promoted, particularly in countries that are in transition or recovering from conflict. It is in this spirit that the Philippines supports the call for the establishment of a Democracy Fund.

The Philippines is prepared to provide technical support and training in the areas of governance, administration of justice, electoral processes and similar subjects. We will share our knowledge borne out of our own experience as Asia's first democracy and having had to struggle to regain and preserve that very same democracy.

The world should continue to support the people of Iraq in their valiant efforts to create a democratic, free, pluralistic and secure nation. The Philippines stands ready to assist in

implementing Security Council resolution 1546 on Iraq, which was unanimously adopted during our Presidency of the Council last June.

We note with satisfaction the successful convening of the National Conference in Baghdad last month which established the Interim National Council. The United Nations in Iraq (UNOMI) has a big role to play in the political process leading to the scheduled elections in January next year and deserve the full support of the international community in its efforts to build a stable and peaceful future Iraq.

The Philippines remains committed to the people of Iraq is prepared to provide technical training in the Philippines for their civil servants, including medical and health personnel, through third-party support.

Conflict has devastating effects on the safety and security of people. Deliberate victimization of innocent civilians is increasingly being used as a weapon of war and as a tool of terrorists. The Philippines in various multilateral fora has consistently advocated for all 75nr to buTj oeery neo re.

In a world where people are sometimes reduced to images on a screen and their suffering distilled into pixels and fonts, perhaps we should again be reminded: that when we gave life to our United Nations almost 60 years ago, we ushered in a new era in the human saga, embarking on our historic journey with the words:

"We the peoples of the United Nations..."

Thank you, Mr. President.