

Address by President Bill Clinton to the UN General Assembly

October 22, 1995

Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, distinguished guests. This week the United Nations is 50 years old. The dreams of its founders have not been fully realized, but its promise endures. The value of the United Nations can be seen the world over in the nourished bodies of once-starving children; in the full lives of those immunized against disease; in the eyes of students eager to learn; in the environment sustained, the refugees saved, the peace kept; and most recently, in standing up for the human rights and human possibilities of women and their children at the Beijing conference.

The United Nations is the product of faith and knowledge: Faith that different peoples can work together for tolerance, decency, and peace; knowledge that this faith will be forever tested by the forces of intolerance, depravity, and aggression. Now we must summon that faith and act on that knowledge to meet the challenges of a new era.

In the United States, some people ask, "Why should we bother with the U.N.? America is strong; we can go it alone." Well, we will act, if we have to, alone. But my fellow Americans should not forget that our values and our interests are also served by working with the U.N.

The U.N. helps the peacemakers, the care providers, the defenders of freedom and human rights, the architects of economic prosperity, and the protectors of our planet to spread the risk, share the burden, and increase the impact of our common efforts.

Last year I pledged that the United States would continue to contribute substantially to the U.N.'s finances. Historically, the United States has been, and today it remains, the largest contributor to the United Nations. But I am determined that we must fully meet our obligations, and I am working with our Congress on a plan to do so.

All who contribute to the U.N.'s work and care about its future must also be committed to reform, to ending bureaucratic inefficiencies and outdated priorities. The U.N. must be able to show that the money it receives supports saving and enriching people's lives, not unneeded overhead. Reform requires breaking up bureaucratic fiefdoms, eliminating obsolete agencies, and doing more with less. The U.N. must reform to remain relevant and to play a still stronger role in the march of freedom, peace, and prosperity.

We see it around the world in the Middle East and Northern Ireland, people turning from a violent past to a future of peace. In South Africa and Haiti, long nights and fears have given way to new days of freedom. Throughout this hemisphere, every nation except one has chosen

democracy, and the goal of an integrated, peaceful, and democratic Europe is now within our reach for the first time. In the Balkans, the international community's determination and NATO's resolve have made prospects for peace brighter than they have been for 4 long years.

Let me salute the U.N.'s efforts on behalf of the people of Bosnia. The nations that took part in UNPROFOR kept the toll of this terrible war in lives lost, wounds left unhealed, children left unfed from being far graver still.

Next week, the parties to the war in Bosnia will meet in Dayton, Ohio, under the auspices of the United States and our Contact Group partners, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, to intensify the search for peace. Many fundamental differences remain. But I urge the parties to seize this chance for a settlement. If they achieve peace, the United States will be there with our friends and allies to help secure it.

All over the world, people yearn to live in peace. And that dream is becoming a reality. But our time is not free of peril. As the cold war gives way to the global village, too many people remain vulnerable to poverty, disease, and underdevelopment. And all of us are exposed to ethnic and religious hatred, the reckless aggression of rogue states, terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The emergence of the information and technology age has brought us all closer together and given us extraordinary opportunities to build a better future. But in our global village, progress can spread quickly, but trouble can, too. Trouble on the far end of town soon becomes a plague on everyone's house. We can't free our own neighborhoods from drug-related crime without the help of countries where the drugs are produced. We can't track down terrorists without assistance from other governments. We can't prosper or preserve our environment unless sustainable development is a reality for all nations. And our vigilance alone can't keep nuclear weapons stored half a world away from falling into the wrong hands.

Nowhere is cooperation more vital than in fighting the increasingly interconnected groups that traffic in terror, organized crime, drug smuggling, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. No one is immune: not the people of Japan, where terrorists unleash nerve gas in the subway and poison thousands; not the people of Latin America or Southeast Asia, where drug traffickers wielding imported weapons have murdered judges, journalists, police officers, and innocent passers-by; not the people of Israel and France where hatemongers have blown up buses and trains full of children with suitcase bombs made from smuggled explosives; not the people of the former Soviet Union and Central Europe, where organized criminals seek to weaken new democracies and prey on decent, hard-working men and women; and not the people of the United States, where homegrown terrorists blew up a Federal building in the heart of America and foreign terrorists tried to topple the World Trade Center and plotted to destroy the very hall we gather in today.

These forces jeopardize the global trend toward peace and freedom, undermine fragile new democracies, sap the strength from developing countries, threaten our efforts to build a safer, more prosperous world.

So today I call upon all nations to join us in the fight against them. Our common efforts can produce results. To reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction, we are working with Russia to reduce our nuclear arsenals by two-thirds. We supported Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus in removing nuclear weapons from their soil. We worked with the states of the former Soviet Union to safeguard nuclear materials and convert them to peaceful use. North Korea has agreed to freeze its nuclear program under international monitoring. Many of the nations in this room succeeded in getting the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

To stem the flow of narcotics and stop the spread of organized crime, we are cooperating with many nations, sharing information, providing military support, initiating anticorruption efforts. And results are coming. With Colombian authorities, we have cracked down on the cartels that control the world's cocaine market. Two years ago, they lived as billionaires beyond the law; now many are living as prisoners behind bars.

To take on terrorists, we maintain strong sanctions against states that sponsor terrorism and defy the rule of law, such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan. We ask them today again to turn from that path. Meanwhile, we increase our own law enforcement efforts and our cooperation with other nations.

Nothing we do will make us invulnerable, but we all can become less vulnerable if we work together. That is why today I am announcing new initiatives to fight international organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, initiatives we can take on our own and others we hope we will take together in the form of an international declaration to promote the safety of the world's citizens.

First, the steps we will take: Yesterday, I directed our Government to identify and put on notice nations that tolerate money laundering. Criminal enterprises are moving vast sums of ill-gotten gains through the international financial system with absolute impunity. We must not allow them to wash the blood off profits from the sale of drugs from terror or organized crimes. Nations should bring their banks and financial systems into conformity with the international anti-money-laundering standards. We will work to help them to do so. And if they refuse, we will consider appropriate sanctions. Next, I directed our Government to identify the front companies and to freeze the assets of the largest drug ring in the world, the Cali cartel, to cut off its economic lifelines and to stop our own people from dealing unknowingly with its companies. Finally, I have instructed the Justice Department to prepare legislation to provide our other agencies with the tools they need to respond to organized criminal activity.

But because we must win this battle together, I now invite every country to join in negotiating and endorsing a declaration on international crime and citizen safety, a declaration which would

first include a no-sanctuary pledge, so that we could say together to organized criminals, terrorists, drug traffickers, and smugglers, "You have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide."

Second, a counterterrorism pact, so that we would together urge more states to ratify existing antiterrorism treaties and work with us to shut down the gray markets that outfit terrorists and criminals with firearms and false documents.

Third, an antinarcotics offensive. The international drug trade poisons people, breeds violence, tears at the moral fabric of our society. We must intensify action against the cartels and the destruction of drug crops. And we, in consumer nations like the United States, must decrease demand for drugs.

Fourth, an effective police force partnership. International criminal organizations target nations whose law enforcement agencies lack the experience and capacity to stop them. To help police in the new democracies of Central Europe, Hungary and the United States established an international law enforcement academy in Budapest. Now we should consider a network of centers all around the world to share the latest crime-fighting techniques and technology.

Fifth, we need an illegal arms and deadly materials control effort that we all participate in. A package the size of a child's lunch bag held the poison gas used to terrorize Tokyo. A lump of plutonium no bigger than a soda can is enough to make an atomic bomb. Building on efforts already underway with the states of the former Soviet Union and with our G-7 partners, we will seek to better account for, store, and safeguard materials with massive destructive power. We should strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention, pass the comprehensive test ban treaty next year, and ultimately eliminate the deadly scourge of landmines. We must press other countries and our own Congress to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention and to intensify our efforts to combat the global illegal arms network that fuels terrorism, equips drug cartels, and prolongs deadly conflicts. This is a full and challenging agenda, but we must complete it, and we must do it together.

Fifty years ago, as the conference that gave birth to the United Nations got underway in San Francisco, a young American war hero recorded his impressions of that event for a newspaper. "The average GI in the street doesn't seem to have a very clear-cut conception of what this meeting's about," wrote the young John F. Kennedy. But one bemedaled Marine sergeant gave the general reaction when he said, "I don't know much about what's going on, but if they just fix it so we don't have to fight anymore, they can count me in."

Well, the United Nations has not ended war, but it has made it less likely and helped many nations to turn from war to peace. The United Nations has not stopped human suffering, but it has healed the wounds and lengthened the lives of millions of human beings. The United Nations has not banished repression or poverty from the Earth, but it has advanced the cause of freedom and prosperity on every continent. The United Nations has not been all that we wished it would be, but it has been a force for good and a bulwark against evil.

So at the dawn of a new century so full of promise, yet plagued by peril, we still need the United Nations. And so, for another 50 years and beyond, you can count the United States in. Thank you very much.

Address by President Bill Clinton to the UN General Assembly

September 22, 1997

Remarks to the 52d Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Mr. President, Secretary-General, distinguished guests: Five years ago, when I first addressed this Assembly, the cold war had only just ended, and the transition to a new era was beginning. Now, together, we are making that historic transition.

Behind us we leave a century full of humanity's capacity for the worst and its genius for the best. Before us, at the dawn of a new millennium, we can envision a new era that escapes the 20th century's darkest moments, fulfills its most brilliant possibilities, and crosses frontiers yet unimagined.

We are off to a promising start. For the first time in history, more than half the people represented in this Assembly freely choose their own governments. Free markets are growing, spreading individual opportunity and national well-being. Early in the 21st century, more than 20 of this Assembly's members, home to half the Earth's population, will lift themselves from the ranks of low-income nations.

Powerful forces are bringing us closer together, profoundly changing the way we work and live and relate to each other. Every day millions of our citizens on every continent use laptops and satellites to send information, products, and money across the planet in seconds. Bit by bit, the information age is chipping away at the barriers, economic, political, and social, that once kept people locked in and ideas locked out. Science is unraveling mysteries in the tiniest of human genes and the vast cosmos.

Never in the course of human history have we had a greater opportunity to make our people healthier and wiser, to protect our planet from decay and abuse, to reap the benefits of free markets without abandoning the social contract and its concern for the common good. Yet today's possibilities are not tomorrow's guarantees. We have work to do.

The forces of global integration are a great tide, inexorably wearing away the established order of things. But we must decide what will be left in its wake. People fear change when they feel its burdens but not its benefits. They are susceptible to misguided protectionism, to the poisoned appeals of extreme nationalism, and ethnic, racial, and religious hatred. New global

environmental challenges require us to find ways to work together without damaging legitimate aspirations for progress. We're all vulnerable to the reckless acts of rogue states and to an unholy axis of terrorists, drug traffickers, and international criminals. These 21st century predators feed on the very free flow of information and ideas and people we cherish. They abuse the vast power of technology to build black markets for weapons, to compromise law enforcement with huge bribes of illicit cash, to launder money with the keystroke of a computer. These forces are our enemies. We must face them together because no one can defeat them alone.

To seize the opportunities and move against the threats of this new global era, we need a new strategy of security. Over the past 5 years, nations have begun to put that strategy in place through a new network of institutions and arrangements with distinct missions but a common purpose: to secure and strengthen the gains of democracy and free markets while turning back their enemies.

We see this strategy taking place on every continent: expanded military alliances like NATO, its Partnership For Peace, its partnerships with a democratic Russia and a democratic Ukraine; free-trade arrangements like the WTO and the global information technology agreement and the move toward free-trade areas by nations in the Americas, the Asia-Pacific region, and elsewhere around the world; strong arms control regimes like the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Non-Proliferation Treaty; multinational coalitions with zero tolerance for terrorism, corruption, crime, and drug trafficking; binding international commitments to protect the environment and safeguard human rights.

Through this web of institutions and arrangements, nations are now setting the international ground rules for the 21st century, laying a foundation for security and prosperity for those who live within them, while isolating those who challenge them from the outside. This system will develop and endure only if those who follow the rules of peace and freedom fully reap their rewards. Only then will our people believe that they have a stake in supporting and shaping the emerging international system.

The United Nations must play a leading role in this effort, filling in the faultlines of the new global era. The core missions it has pursued during its first half-century will be just as relevant during the next half-century: the pursuit of peace and security, promoting human rights, and moving people from poverty to dignity and prosperity through sustainable development.

Conceived in the caldron of war, the United Nations' first task must remain the pursuit of peace and security. For 50 years, the U.N. has helped prevent world war and nuclear holocaust. Unfortunately, conflicts between nations and within nations has endured. From 1945 until today, they have cost 20 million lives. Just since the end of the cold war, each year there have been more than 30 armed conflicts in which more than a thousand people have lost their lives, including, of course, a quarter of a million killed in the former Yugoslavia and more than half a million in Rwanda.

Millions of personal tragedies the world over are a warning that we dare not be complacent or indifferent. Trouble in a far corner can become a plague on everyone's house.

People the world over cheer the hopeful developments in Northern Ireland, grieve over the innocent loss of life and the stalling of the peace process in the Middle East, and long for a resolution of the differences on the Korean Peninsula or between Greece and Turkey or between the great nations of India and Pakistan as they celebrate the 50th anniversaries of their birth.

The United Nations continues to keep many nations away from bloodshed, in El Salvador and Mozambique, in Haiti and Namibia, in Cyprus and in Bosnia, where so much remains to be done but can still be done because the bloodshed has ended.

The record of service of the United Nations has left a legacy of sacrifice. Just last week, we lost some of our finest sons and daughters in a crash of a U.N. helicopter in Bosnia. Five were Americans, five were Germans, one Polish, and one British, all citizens of the world we are trying to make, each a selfless servant of peace. And the world is poorer for their passing.

At this very moment, the United Nations is keeping the peace in 16 countries, often in partnership with regional organizations like NATO, the OAS, ASEAN, and ECOWAS, avoiding wider conflicts and even greater suffering. Our shared commitment to more realistic peacekeeping training for U.N. troops, a stronger role for civilian police, better integration between military and civilian agencies, all these will help the United Nations to meet these missions in the years ahead.

At the same time, we must improve the U.N.'s capabilities after a conflict ends to help peace become self-sustaining. The U.N. cannot build nations, but it can help nations to build themselves by fostering legitimate institutions of government, monitoring elections, and laying a strong foundation for economic reconstruction.

This week the Security Council will hold an unprecedented ministerial meeting on African security, which our Secretary of State is proud to chair and which President Mugabe, chairman of the Organization of African Unity, will address. It will highlight the role the United Nations can and should play in preventing conflict on a continent where amazing progress toward democracy and development is occurring alongside still too much discord, disease, and distress.

In the 21st century, our security will be challenged increasingly by interconnected groups that traffic in terror, organized crime, and drug smuggling. Already these international crime and drug syndicates drain up to \$750 billion a year from legitimate economies. That sum exceeds the combined GNP of more than half the nations in this room. These groups threaten to undermine confidence in fragile new democracies and market economies that so many of you are working so hard to see endure.

Two years ago, I called upon all the members of this Assembly to join in the fight against these forces. I applaud the U.N.'s recent resolution calling on its members to join the major international antiterrorism conventions, making clear the emerging international consensus that terrorism is always a crime and never a justifiable political act. As more countries sign on, terrorists will have fewer places to run or hide.

I also applaud the steps that members are taking to implement the declaration on crime and public security that the United States proposed 2 years ago, calling for increased cooperation to strengthen every citizen's right to basic safety through cooperation on extradition and asset forfeiture, shutting down gray markets for guns and false documents, attacking corruption, and bringing higher standards to law enforcement in new democracies.

The spread of these global criminal syndicates also has made all the more urgent our common quest to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. We cannot allow them to fall or to remain in the wrong hands. Here, too, the United Nations must lead, and it has, from UNSCOM in Iraq to the International Atomic Energy Agency, now the most expansive global system ever devised to police arms control agreements.

When we met here last year, I was honored to be the first of 146 leaders to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, our commitment to end all nuclear tests for all time, the longest sought, hardest fought prize in the history of arms control. It will help to prevent the nuclear powers from developing more advanced and more dangerous weapons. It will limit the possibilities for other states to acquire such devices. I am pleased to announce that today I am sending this crucial treaty to the United States Senate for ratification. Our common goal should be to enter the CTBT into force as soon as possible, and I ask for all of you to support that goal.

The United Nations' second core mission must be to defend and extend universal human rights and to help democracy's remarkable gains endure. Fifty years ago, the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated the international community's conviction that people everywhere have the right to be treated with dignity, to give voice to their opinions, to choose their leaders; that these rights are universal, not American rights, not Western rights, not rights for the developed world only but rights inherent in the humanity of people everywhere. Over the past decade, these rights have become a reality for more people than ever, from Asia to Africa, from Europe to the Americas. In a world that links rich and poor, north and south, city and countryside in an electronic network of shared images in real time, the more these universal rights take hold, the more people who do not enjoy them will demand them. Armed with photocopiers and fax machines, E-mail and the Internet, supported by an increasingly important community of nongovernmental organizations, they will make their demands known, spreading the spirit of freedom which, as the history of the last 10 years has shown us, ultimately will prevail.

The United Nations must be prepared to respond not only by setting standards but by implementing them. To deter abuses, we should strengthen the U.N.'s field operations and early

warning systems. To strengthen democratic institutions, the best guarantors of human rights, we must pursue programs to help new legal, parliamentary, and electoral institutions get off the ground. To punish those responsible for crimes against humanity and to promote justice so that peace endures, we must maintain our strong support for the U.N.'s war crime tribunals and truth commissions. And before the century ends, we should establish a permanent international court to prosecute the most serious violations of humanitarian law.

The United States welcomes the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen the role of human rights within the U.N. system and his splendid choice of Mary Robinson as the new High Commissioner. We will work hard to make sure that she has the support she needs to carry out her mandate.

Finally, the United Nations has a special responsibility to make sure that as the global economy creates greater wealth, it does not produce growing disparities between the haves and havenots or threaten the global environment, our common home. Progress is not yet everyone's partner. More than half the world's people are 2 days' walk from a telephone, literally disconnected from the global economy. Tens of millions lack the education, the training, the skills they need to make the most of their God-given abilities.

The men and women of the United Nations have expertise across the entire range of humanitarian and development activities. Every day they are making a difference. We see it in nourished bodies of once starving children, in the full lives of those immunized against disease, in the bright eyes of children exposed to education through the rich storehouse of human knowledge, in refugees cared for and returned to their homes, in the health of rivers and lakes restored.

The United Nations must focus even more on shifting resources from hand-outs to handups, on giving people the tools they need to make the most of their own destinies. Spreading ideas in education and technology, the true wealth of nations, is the best way to give people a chance to succeed.

And the U.N. must continue to lead in ensuring that today's progress does not come at tomorrow's expense. When the nations of the world gather again next December in Kyoto for the U.N. Climate Change Conference, all of us, developed and developing nations, must seize the opportunity to turn back the clock on greenhouse gas emissions so that we can leave a healthy planet to our children.

In these efforts, the U.N. no longer can and no longer need go it alone. Innovative partnerships with the private sector, NGO's, and the international financial institutions can leverage its effectiveness many times over. Last week, a truly visionary American, Ted Turner, made a remarkable donation to strengthen the U.N.'s development and humanitarian programs. His gesture highlights the potential for partnership between the U.N. and the private sector in contributions of time, resources, and expertise. And I hope more will follow his lead.

In this area and others, the Secretary-General is aggressively pursuing the most far-reaching reform of the United Nations in its history, not to make the U.N. smaller as an end in itself but to make it better. The United States strongly supports his leadership. We should pass the Secretary-General's reform agenda this session.

On every previous occasion I have addressed this Assembly, the issue of our country's dues has brought the commitment of the United States to the United Nations into question. The United States was a founder of the U.N. We are proud to be its host. We believe in its ideals. We continue to be, as we have been, its largest contributor. We are committed to seeing the United Nations succeed in the 21st century.

This year, for the first time since I have been President, we have an opportunity to put the questions of debts and dues behind us once and for all and to put the United Nations on a sounder financial footing for the future. I have made it a priority to work with our Congress on comprehensive legislation that would allow us to pay off the bulk of our arrears and assure full financing of America's assessment in the years ahead. Our Congress' actions to solve this problem reflects a strong bipartisan commitment to the United Nations and to America's role within it. At the same time, we look to member states to adopt a more equitable scale of assessment.

Let me say that we also strongly support expanding the Security Council to give more countries a voice in the most important work of the U.N. In more equitably sharing responsibility for its successes, we can make the U.N. stronger and more democratic than it is today. I ask the General Assembly to act on these proposals this year so that we can move forward together.

At the dawn of a new century, so full of hope but not free of peril, more than ever we need a United Nations where people of reason can work through shared problems and take action to combat them, where nations of good will can join in the struggle for freedom and prosperity, where we can shape a future of peace and progress and the preservation of our planet.

We have the knowledge, we have the intelligence, we have the energy, we have the resources for the work before us. We are building the necessary networks of cooperation. The great question remaining is whether we have the vision and the heart necessary to imagine a future that is different from the past, necessary to free ourselves from destructive patterns of relations with each other and within our own nations and live a future that is different.

A new century and a new millennium is upon us. We are literally present at the future, and it is the great gift, it is our obligation, to leave to our children. Thank you very much.