

THE UNITED NATIONS: A NEW ERA

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to the United Nations General Assembly, 2 October 1990.

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate you, Dr de Marco, on your election to the Presidency of this General Assembly, a role for which your extensive experience in international relations, your legal training, and your interest in human rights qualify you highly. The excellent relationship between Australia and Malta is long-standing, based on extensive family and community ties as well as our strong and active membership of the Commonwealth, and we look forward to working closely with you. I would also join others in extending a warm welcome to Namibia and Liechtenstein, the newest members of the United Nations.

We meet today in the General Assembly on the eve of the re-creation of a united Germany, an event which marks - as no other could do so clearly - the end of the post-War era. It is an era that has been dominated by the Cold War and nuclear confrontation, but has also seen extraordinary change: the end of the European colonial empires and the re-emergence of the independent nations of Africa and Asia; the economic reconstruction and ever closer political association of Western Europe; and - starting with the creation of the Bank and the Fund and the specialised agencies of the UN - the growth of multilateralism on a remarkable and unprecedented scale.

But the post-War era has left for us many problems that still remain to be solved. Iraq's aggression in the Gulf has shown that the habits of millennia are not going to change overnight, and that the arrogance of military power remains a scourge with which the world will still have to deal. The scourges of hunger, ill-health, poverty and debt remain to an intolerable extent, threatening to widen rather than narrow the already alarming gulf between North and South. The scourge of racism, and ethnic and religious hatred, still remains to be purged from many countries and regions. And there is another scourge - the impact of human activity upon the sustaining environment of our planet itself - the magnitude of which we are only beginning now to recognise.

The challenge for us all in the new era ahead of us - as relationships, policies and attitudes that had been frozen for so long continue to unfreeze, as the Cold War becomes the Great Thaw - is to confront and overcome these scourges once and for all. If that is to happen we will need, above all else, to develop habits of mind which are cooperative rather confrontational, and habits of action which are instinctively multilateral. Whether the challenge goes to the physical security of nations, the economic health of their peoples,

the environmental integrity of the planet itself, or any other problem that no nation can solve wholly by itself, then we have to derive inspiration from the thought that we are one world, and can each survive only if we all can act collectively.

There is nothing inevitable about the development of any such approach, although events of recent weeks and months can certainly give us heart. The trends that will shape this era are our own to make. Indeed it is the actions over the next few years of the very men and women who have been assembled in this building over the past week, which will launch this era for good or for ill. The world has been given a second chance, and this time we must not again take a false turn.

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How we shape the security system of the new era is being comprehensively tested at its outset by the present Gulf crisis. If unity holds in this instance - if this community of nations, acting together under the authority of the UN Charter, and with the full support of the Security Council, succeeds in demonstrating beyond doubt that aggression does not pay and cannot succeed - the demonstration effect will weigh heavily on those nations, particularly those with great comparative regional power, which might in the future be tempted to settle disagreements by intimidation and force. If our resolve weakens, the demonstration effect will be equally convincing in its message that the international community is powerless to enforce decisions that we all recognise to be just. Such an outcome is unthinkable.

The crisis in the Gulf can only be resolved on the basis of the conditions set by the UN Security Council Resolutions being fully and unequivocally met - i.e. by Iraq completely withdrawing from Kuwait, the restoration of the legitimate Kuwaiti Government and the release of all foreign nationals who want to leave. It is Australia's hope that these objectives can be met through the rigorous application of sanctions pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 661, 665 and 670. Military strike action cannot and should not be wholly ruled out at the end of the day, should all other means of resolving the crisis fail, but Australia shares the universal hope that sanity will prevail, and that a peace without appeasement will be achieved without the horrors of war having to be contemplated.

We can draw both encouragement and hope for the future from the unprecedented level of international cooperation to meet the crisis - cooperation which has enabled the UN Security Council to respond promptly and effectively, and restored the Council to its proper central place in international security. The greater willingness of the Permanent Five members of the Security Council to work together has not only held the line in the Gulf crisis, but has been a crucial factor in the now hopefully imminent resolution of the Cambodian problem - one that has not only involved many years of tragedy for the Cambodian people, but a severe on-going challenge to the security of the South East Asia

region.

A detailed framework for a comprehensive Cambodian settlement has been drafted and agreed by the Permanent Five over the course of this year, and accepted in its entirety by a meeting of the Cambodian parties convened by the Paris Conference Co-Chairmen in Jakarta last month. That framework document - based in significant part, we are gratified to note, on ideas developed by Australia for an enhanced UN role - involves two central components: first, the creation of a fully representative Supreme National Council to embody the sovereignty of the Cambodian nation; and, secondly, a role for the UN which extends not only to traditional peace-keeping activity and increasingly an common electoral organisation, but responsibility as well for key elements of civil administration in the transitional period pending free and fair elections. The SNC has been formally established, it will occupy the Cambodian seat in the United Nations, and the process of putting in place a final comprehensive settlement, endorsed by a reconvened Paris Conference, is well under way. A number of matters, both procedural and substantive, remain to be negotiated, and there is bound to be some faltering before the process is complete, but the commitment of relevant countries and parties to finally achieving peace is now such that it is possible, after years of frustration and disappointment, to be much more optimistic than ever before that a durable peace will shortly be achieved.

For some other long-running regional conflicts the outlook is much less bright. Pre-eminent among them is the Palestinian issue, which - whatever the outcome of the Gulf crisis - will simply not go away until it is resolved in a manner which meets the basic needs and aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis. Australia has consistently expressed support for a peaceful resolution of the Arab/Israeli dispute on the Palestinian issue on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. We assert Israel's right to live within secure and recognised borders, but also acknowledge that of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including their right to an independent state if they so choose. We regard the proposals for the establishment of an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue as a step towards the achievement of a peaceful settlement, and encourage all the involved parties to pursue that dialogue with real and sustained commitment.

One aspect of this issue which continues to hinder the peace process is General Assembly Resolution 3379 of 1975, equating Zionism with racism. Australia remains strongly opposed to this Resolution, which only exacerbates the differences between the parties. We hope that, with the revitalisation of its role and responsibilities in promoting international cooperation, the United Nations will rescind the Resolution.

Another Middle East issue of continuing concern is the situation in Lebanon, a country torn apart by conflict now for fifteen years. The Taif Agreement, concluded in October last year by the Lebanese themselves with the support of the Arab League, represented a welcome breakthrough. The international community should stand ready to assist Lebanon in achieving peace, but the essential requirement is that there be a commitment from all

the parties in Lebanon to national reconciliation and a willingness to compromise to arrive at a negotiated solution. If anything has become clear over the last fifteen years, it is that a lasting solution cannot be imposed by force.

The continuing troubles in Cyprus are another instance of entrenched attitudes making reconciliation extremely difficult. The failure of the attempt to revive the intercommunal talks in February was particularly disappointing. Prospects for progress will remain bleak unless there is a real determination to succeed on both sides, and a willingness to enter into negotiations free of preconditions. Australia continues to support the efforts of the Secretary General to promote a negotiated solution in the belief that this is the route by which a just settlement is most likely to be reached.

That just settlements of apparently intractable problems can be reached with the help of the international community is amply demonstrated by recent events in Southern Africa. In Namibia, the United Nations mounted one of most complex peace-keeping operation in its history and played a vital role in guaranteeing the impartiality of the elections and of the transition process. And in South Africa itself, the Government has, over the past few months, at last begun to take steps towards negotiations with representatives of the majority of South Africans and towards dismantling the repressive and brutal system of apartheid. The Australian Government warmly welcomes the statesmanship shown to date by President de Klerk, but urges the South African Government to move as soon as possible into substantive constitutional negotiations and to remove the remaining legislative cornerstones of the apartheid system. More does need to be done before those who have suffered under apartheid, and those who support their struggle, can be confident that developments in South Africa do constitute "profound and irreversible change". We believe that sanctions imposed by the international community have played a central role in bringing about the important changes now under way, and that this sanctions pressure should not yet be reduced or lifted. But we hope the time will rapidly come when it can be.

For Australia, the South Pacific is also an area of vital interest and we continue to encourage processes of political development in this region. We are gratified in this respect by the continuing success of the Matignon and Oudinot Accords in creating a constructive and peaceful environment in New Caledonia for the working out of that country's political future. Equally, however, we continue to be deeply disappointed at the backward steps that occurred in Fiji with the events of 1987 and the recent promulgation of a Constitution which, while marking a welcome return to representative constitutional government, nonetheless in the process builds new and far-reaching racially discriminatory principles into the Fijian political system.

Two countries in the Pacific who have been frustrated in fully developing a political identity of their own are the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, and Australia believes the United Nations has a constructive role to play in this respect. The full fruits of self-government which should have followed their legitimate acts of self-

determination have been denied to them by legalistic approaches to the question of their political status. The continued application of the trusteeship regime to them not only belittles what they have already achieved in establishing independent political identities, but imposes practical disadvantages on them in their pursuit of national development.

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If the coming era is to learn from the mistakes of the past, we need not only to find new cooperative ways of resolving regional problems - whether these be potentially global or much more limited in their consequences - but to tackle with determination and stamina the most alarming global security problems of the Cold War era - the upward spiral of arms procurement and the proliferation of increasingly more destructive weapons. That task is all the more important in our increasingly multipolar world. While the progress made by the United States and the Soviet Union in their bilateral negotiations is evidence of superpower commitment to a more peaceful world, it should also now be complemented by progress in multilateral disarmament negotiations.

We in Australia are proud of our commitment to the process of disarmament, and intend to redouble our efforts to capitalise on the current circumstances to achieve specific disarmament goals in the multilateral context, particularly in relation to chemical and nuclear weapons. Significant progress on the achievement of a Chemical Weapons Convention has been made in the last year, but the need to conclude this Convention is now greater than ever, and the opportunity to do so must be seized. Australia believes that a decisive step towards this goal would be a ministerial-level meeting of the Conference on Disarmament to be held as soon as possible.

We will also continue to work assiduously to eliminate nuclear weapons. Australia is proud of our part, together with the other members of the South Pacific Forum, in the creation of the Treaty of Rarotonga, which has established a nuclear free zone in the South Pacific. We will not rest until a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has been achieved with appropriate verification procedures. To help move towards that goal, we will be once more proposing with New Zealand and other co-sponsors a resolution on a CTB this year and look forward to again receiving strong support for it. We would wish this support to be carried over to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, which is the appropriate forum for a CTB to be negotiated. We are therefore pleased that the CD has this year re-established an Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban as which will provide the opportunity for important preparatory work to a CTB to be undertaken.

Australia was an active participant in the recent Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in Geneva. Despite its regrettable inability to adopt a final declaration, we

nonetheless consider the Conference to have been a considerable success, reaching agreement as it did on a number of important issues, in particular the question of fullscope safeguards as a condition for nuclear supply. We will be working to build on the achievements of the Conference and to set the scene for a successful review and extension of the Treaty in 1995. The Treaty is an absolutely essential foundation on which the new relationships of the coming era must be built.

The acquisition of conventional weapons continues at an alarming rate in many parts of the globe. Often scarce resources are diverted from social and economic development to military expenditure. Australia supports measures by all States to reduce military budgets and to the implementation of confidence building measures which will reduce the risk of conflict.

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At the same time as working together for a future of common security, the world community has a second chance to show its equal determination to create a future of common prosperity. Meeting economic challenges is no less important than meeting security challenges if we are to provide guaranteed life and health for our children, and a fulfilling life for all our citizens.

Australia supports the efforts made by the United Nations in mobilising international support for development efforts. The Eighteenth Special Session of the General Assembly in April highlighted a new sense of commitment and renewed optimism for global economic cooperation. The globalisation of economic problems has been accompanied by a growing awareness that their resolution can be achieved only by a sustained international partnership.

Australia is particularly concerned at the human cost of heavy national indebtedness which severely compromises development efforts in many countries. Debtors and creditors need to address the issues raised by that indebtedness in a spirit of international economic cooperation, and in a way which addresses not only the immediate but long term problems of the nation in question. Debt reduction packages should be implemented in such a way as to enhance credit-worthiness and new money flows, and to support reform programs in heavily indebted countries.

Australia believes firmly that, whatever may be the contribution of debt reduction and development cooperation programs, the expansion of global trade is central to economic growth and development.

The Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations under GATT auspices is fundamentally about creating a more secure, stable and open international economic

environment. The GATT provides a framework of rights and obligations within which economic ambition can be channelled to the benefit of all countries, and not just the few most powerful. This is why the success of the Uruguay Round is so important. Between now and the final Ministerial Meeting in Brussels in December, all participants in the negotiations will have to intensify their efforts, and develop more of a spirit of compromise than has so far been evident, if a successful outcome is to be achieved. Nobody should be in any doubt that failure would be disastrous for the world trading economy, for all the developing nations dependent on selling their commodities in the international marketplace, and, indeed, for all the people we represent.

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In addition to the abiding issues of security and economic development, there is a "third agenda" of problems now being given much increased prominence in international relations - problems that are either too big for each country to solve individually or which are of a character that global action or global pressure can very much help to solve. In areas such as threats to the global environment, health problems like AIDS, the illicit narcotics trade, and the problem of refugees and displaced persons, global interdependence is an omnipresent reality, and multilateral diplomacy an indispensable necessity. The era which we are entering is marked by the multiplication of such problems, and the quality of life of the people we represent will be very much determined by our ability to solve them.

The global environment is certainly one of the key international issues of the 1990s. We are now working towards the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development which should deal with these two issues in an integrated way. The Conference will not succeed, however, unless considerably more effort is put into reconciling the conflicts between environmental and economic development policies. The two are not inconsistent: the goal of 'sustainable development' can be achieved. But if the UN is to lead international efforts in this sphere, we must stop discussing the processes and start debating the substance. For the UN to make the most constructive input into solving these problems, there has to be greater coordination between UN environment agencies, such as UNEP, and UN development agencies, such as UNDP and UNCTAD. There is no obvious need for more agencies and institutions to deal with these issues; we do need to strengthen our existing institutions and improve communications and coordination between them.

Australia is a strong supporter of the Antarctic Treaty System, which reflects the principles and purposes of the UN Charter and has brought peace, stability and remarkable international cooperation to a very special region of the globe. Moves are now under way, with strong support from Australia, for the establishment within the Treaty System of a far-sighted comprehensive environmental protection regime, one aspect of which would hopefully be a permanent ban on mining and oil drilling within the region, to guarantee once and for all the permanence of its uniquely fragile and irreplaceable environment. I

would urge those countries not presently involved in these discussions but interested in promoting environmental protection in Antarctica to join the Antarctic Treaty, for it is only through that framework that an effective regime can and will be put in place.

Two other issues directly and immediately affecting the lives of individual citizens also particularly require concerted international action. The 1990s have been declared the Decade against Drug Abuse; Australia will continue to strive - in multilateral forums, with bilateral assistance, and by domestic action - to reverse the growth of this menace. In the global struggle against the AIDS pandemic, Australia has supported the World Health Organisation's central coordinating role and is providing financial assistance to the WHO's Global Plan on AIDS for the development of national AIDS programs, particularly in South East Asia, and the Pacific and Indian Ocean island countries.

Human rights issues generally remain very much part of the new international agenda. The most important factor in establishing human rights in this new era will be the spread of democracy to those parts of the world where democratic freedoms are still unknown. The growth of democracy in East Europe has already seen an encouraging reduction in East-West confrontation in the international human rights arena. We have welcomed, in particular, a new spirit of co-operation in the Commission on Human Rights.

Unfortunately, the record in human rights in all too many parts of the world has not been all positive over the past year. Australia is appalled at the treatment of innocent civilians caught up in the Gulf crisis, and condemns in the strongest terms restrictions imposed by the Government of Iraq on the freedom of movement of hostages held in that country and in Kuwait. Closer to home, Australia is also concerned with continuing restrictions on democratic and individual freedoms in both China and Myanmar, and we appeal to all involved in the situation in Sri Lanka to end the cycle of violence which is destroying the fabric of society in that nation. We frankly acknowledge that Australia's own past is not without blemish in regard to human rights, in particular concerning the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However we have progressed along the path of rectifying those injustices, we welcome international scrutiny of our efforts, and are prepared to engage in dialogue with any interested country at any time on such issues. We take the view that the question of conformity to international human rights standards is not each country's own internal business, but the world's business.

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I said at the outset that, as we move beyond the post-War era, the world has been given a second chance. This body, the United Nations Organisation, has also been given a second chance, and we, its members, have to ensure that it is capable of grasping this opportunity. In many ways, the founders of the United Nations were farsighted and built structures that will now stand us in good stead. In other respects, it is clear that they could not have

foreseen the circumstances of this new era and we should not shy away from change, from the discarding of long established conventions and procedures and from the creation of new structures and new ways of doing things which better suit the new times. Our guiding criterion should be that we wish the UN to be effective and influence events rather than be passively shaped and overwhelmed by them.

One area in which demands on the UN are obviously likely to grow in the new era is the performance of conflict resolution and peace-keeping functions. Indeed already over the past two years, five peace-keeping operations have been established and several others foreshadowed, including of course the comprehensive effort that will be required in Cambodia. The peace-keeping function is still hampered by political, legal, financial and administrative problems. Australia advocates the need for greater efficiency and economy in peace-keeping and for the whole peace-keeping area of UN activity to be put on a firmer financial and administrative footing. I welcome the steps the Secretary-General has recently taken to improve co-ordination and financing of peace-keeping, but note that still more needs to be done.

There is an urgent need to improve the ability of the United Nations not only to service the demands of its members in regard to peace-keeping and peace-making, but also to deal with the major new issues of global interdependence. These major issues must be taken up more substantively and effectively than they are currently in the many different intergovernmental forums of the UN's economic and social sector, and this sector needs to be drastically restructured if we are to see the same revival in the economic aspects of the UN's role that we have seen on political issues. Equally, there must be better central coordination and clearer common purpose among the various agencies and bodies of the UN, if each is to play its proper role in attacking multisectoral problems that can be solved only if they act together.

As far as the organisation as a whole is concerned, universal membership should remain our central principle. In this connection, Australia regards as a relic of the past era the continued absence from the ranks of UN members of the two Koreas. The Republic of Korea has stated its desire to become a full member and we support admission of both Korean States either simultaneously or separately.

The resolutions of this organ of the UN, the General Assembly, embody the views of the broad membership of the organisation. We need to make better use of these Annual Sessions of our General membership. Let us not be reluctant to remove from our agenda many items that are there by custom, and get rid of many time-wasting, if time-honoured, procedures. Let us use this Assembly to set the norms and standards of correct international behaviour in this new era.

The Security Council is showing us how well it can work. At the same time, we have to

acknowledge that the world has changed since 1945 and that there will be increasing and legitimate pressure to ensure that the membership of the Council better accords with today's realities. In any consideration of restructuring, our principal concern must be for the effectiveness of the Council and we need to be certain that what we do enhances and does not risk undermining the efficiency with which the Security Council is currently able to undertake its central role in international peace and security.

The Secretariat, which itself has in the past been the victim of Cold War pressure, requires re-examination to ensure that its structures and its methods of recruiting its top people, both men and women, are best suited to the needs of the organisation in the new era, when the demands upon them will grown ever more immense.

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Two years ago, when I first addressed the United Nations as Australian Foreign Minister, I drew inspiration from the Charter and from the important role my great Australian Labor predecessor, Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, played in the founding of the United Nations. I continue to carry in my mind his vision as to what the institution he helped create should achieve - peace, justice and decent standards of living for all the peoples of the world.

The nations of the world are now entering a new era of cooperation; we are breaking new ground as we at last accept in full our international responsibility to meet aggression and to resolve regional disputes. And in doing this we have recommitted ourselves and our countries to pursue peace and to end human suffering - not in an ad hoc, almost accidental manner, but as part of a growing international determination that we can make no excuses to our constituents, or to our children, if these goals of peace and development cannot be achieved.

This Organisation at last holds out to its members the promise its founders envisaged. But that promise will not be self-fulfilling. It is the historic obligation on us, the members of the United Nations, to take up at this time and build on the new spirit of international cooperation, to bend our efforts to bolster the new multilateral framework for global peace and security, to act vigorously on the economic challenges before us, and to tackle cooperatively all the social and environmental and health issues which demand global remedies. We have another opportunity to put it right, and this time it must not be lost.