



IRELAND

64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Address by the

**Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Mr Peter Power T.D.**

Monday, 28 September 2009

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Mr. President,

Let me begin by warmly congratulating you on your election and extending the best wishes of the Irish Government for a successful term in office.

It is a very great honour to participate in this General Debate and to share this unique global platform. Ireland cherishes its membership of the United Nations. We believe strongly in the purposes, principles and potential of this great Organisation. And we are proud of the role we have ourselves played in developing that potential over the past five decades. We are determined to maintain this role and to remain steadfastly at the service of the UN.

Rarely have the challenges facing the global community been as formidable, or as pressing, as those of today. And rarely has the need been greater for collective action and for the facilitating framework which is uniquely provided by the UN. Our discussions in New York over the past week have highlighted some of the most urgent issues on the Organisation's agenda at present, including climate change, global poverty and hunger, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

We are also confronted with the global financial and economic crisis, the most severe in a generation, which is leaving its mark on every family and community across the world. Governments everywhere are facing a daunting task as they work to mitigate the effects of global recession and economic turbulence and to limit the impact of the crisis on those in greatest need. Once again, the United Nations provides a framework for the elaboration of collective responses and solutions.

The summit of world leaders hosted by Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in New York last week on climate change displayed the strength of international commitment on this issue. The Secretary General has been a powerful advocate of collective action to tackle this major threat to our planet and to future generations. It now falls to us, the

Member States, to redouble our efforts to ensure a successful outcome to the Copenhagen summit in December.

UN REFORM

Mr. President,

The promise which the United Nations embodies to tackle all these global threats can only be realised through continuing efforts to make this a stronger and more effective organisation. Ireland has played, and will continue to play, an active role in championing the reform agenda at the UN.

In the area of System Wide Coherence, the reform agenda is already producing good results and helping to deliver a more effective and relevant UN. The “One UN” programme is delivering improved development performances at individual country level. Ireland warmly welcomes the progress being made in the General Assembly and, in particular, the recent decision to establish a new Gender Entity to promote gender equality. I encourage early action to make the new entity operational in the Assembly’s current session.

The need for greater progress on other parts of the UN reform agenda remains. A positive start has been made to the inter-governmental negotiations on Security Council reform. But more urgency is required in transforming the Council to make it more representative and reflective of twenty-first century realities as well as improving its functioning and increasing its transparency.

DEVELOPMENT

Mr President,

One billion people on this planet go to bed each evening hungry. This situation is an enormous collective failure by all of us. In the last few days world leaders have come together to discuss major, complex global issues such as climate change and non-proliferation. Yet today we also confront the most basic problem of feeding the people of this planet.

I came here to the UN Headquarters a year ago almost to the day, to present to the Secretary-General the report of the Hunger Task Force, a report commissioned by the Irish Government to identify what steps we all can take to address the root causes of hunger.

I speak today as the representative of a country which has experienced famine and a country whose population was decimated after the Great Famine of 1847. Hunger is the result of many failings. Its eradication, and nothing less than its eradication, must be our goal.

In the past year we have witnessed solid progress and we now have strong leadership to act on this urgent crisis of humanity. On Saturday I was greatly encouraged by the engagement of so many Member States here at the UN, under the leadership of Secretary General Ban and US Secretary of State Clinton, with the aim of constructing a roadmap to translate rhetoric and commitment on hunger into action. Our Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security holds the promise of a world free from chronic hunger.

The outlines of our common necessary actions are clear:

We must tackle hunger in a comprehensive way to move from responding to symptoms to addressing the fundamental causes.

We need to invest in agriculture and agricultural research and in particular to support women farmers.

We need to invest in rural infrastructure, enhance nutrition, and support national and regional plans.

Ireland has placed food security and related sectors as a cornerstone of our aid programme. By 2012 we will ensure that 20% of aid programme is hunger-focussed. We are well on our way to this objective.

Mr President,

Hunger is at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals. Our aim is to halve the number of the hungry by 2015. In the context of global wealth and advanced technology, this should be a relatively modest objective. Yet the number of hungry is growing daily. We have a small window of time to achieve this objective. The time for concerted action by all of us is now.

PEACE AND SECURITY

Peace-keeping and the maintenance of international peace and security are central to the UN's role. Ireland is deeply proud of the long-standing contribution which we have made to UN peace-keeping operations across the world. For over half a century, there has been a continuous tradition of Irish peacekeepers serving the cause of peace under the UN flag somewhere in the world. This goes to the heart of our commitment to the UN and the values it represents, a commitment which is an integral part of our foreign policy and which helps to define us as a nation.

It is clear, however, that both the Organisation and contributing countries are being severely stretched in terms of the demands made by a steadily escalating number of peace support operations around the world. The Secretary General's "New Horizons" paper is therefore a very welcome initiative and we look forward to contributing to its early consideration by the General Assembly.

Regional organisations such as the European Union and the African Union play a vital role in helping the UN to fulfil its peace-keeping responsibilities. As the Secretary General acknowledged when he visited Dublin last July, without the unique contributions of regional organisations such as the EU, UN operations would not be able to achieve their goals and could fail entirely. The successful transition from EUFOR to the UN MINURCAT operation in eastern Chad and the Central African Republic earlier this year shows how important and effective this partnership has become, as does the similarly successful transition to the EU rule of law mission in Kosovo.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Mr President,

In Ireland we have known the terrible human cost of conflict. The Irish Government has been developing over the past couple of years a focus on conflict resolution work, building on our own practical experiences with the Northern Ireland peace process. Complementing the work of others, especially that of the United Nations, we hope that we may be able to make a distinctive contribution to conflict resolution efforts in other parts of the world.

As one example, we are engaging actively in Timor Leste, using lessons derived from our peace process to help to increase confidence in policing and security arrangements in that country. I am also proud that the Irish Government is sponsoring a major lessons-learned exercise in relation to Security Council Resolution 1325, which involves interactions between women from Timor Leste, Liberia and Northern Ireland.

DISARMAMENT

Building peace and ending conflict cannot be accomplished without also removing the means of conflict.

Last year, Ireland was proud to host the diplomatic conference which adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions – an historic agreement to ban the production and use of these most destructive of weapons. I warmly welcome the considerable progress which has been made this year towards entry into force. We now need less than ten further ratifications to achieve this and I urge all those Governments which have not yet signed and ratified the CCM to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Ireland has always been strongly supportive of the lead role played by the United Nations in working to promote non-proliferation and to remove the threat posed by nuclear weapons. Ireland was the first country to sign and ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Next year's Review Conference will be of critical importance for efforts to help strengthen the international non-proliferation system, at a time when the threats it faces have perhaps never been greater. We encourage all Member States

to work actively and constructively to achieve a successful outcome and will engage fully in that effort ourselves.

Ireland also applauds and welcomes the renewed focus on nuclear disarmament. We encourage the United States and Russia as they work towards a legally-binding follow-on arrangement to the START treaty, which expires at the end of this year.

HUMAN RIGHTS/INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

We would like to see the UN's active engagement in monitoring human rights situations around the world maintained and strengthened. The Human Rights Council and other human rights mechanisms must be enabled to address the most difficult human rights situations in a timely and effective manner.

Continued support will also be needed for the International Criminal Court and the international tribunals in their efforts to promote justice and to combat impunity. Ireland urges the fullest cooperation on the part of all Member States.

At the 2005 World Summit, this Assembly endorsed the important concept of Responsibility to Protect. It is now imperative to take forward the work to give practical effect to this concept, based on the consensus resolution at the end of the 63rd Session.

MIDDLE EAST

Let me turn now to the situation in the Middle East.

Ireland very much welcomes and supports the renewed international efforts which have been made in recent months to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process with a view to bringing about a comprehensive and lasting peace settlement. Particular praise is due to the US Administration and to the US Middle East Envoy, George Mitchell, for their intensive engagement aimed at achieving the resumption of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority as well as the promotion of peace between Israel and all its neighbours. We are fortunate in Ireland to have had the benefit of George Mitchell's formidable skills, patience and tenacity as a peace-maker.

With our EU partners, we stand ready to work closely with our Israeli and Palestinian partners and to support the US and the Quartet in their efforts. It is vitally important that all parties contribute to confidence-building by fully honouring their commitments and obligations under the Road Map.

This must include real efforts to halt all settlement activities and improve the living conditions of civilians on the ground in the Palestinian territories. Ordinary people must see in their daily lives the benefits which will derive from peace and must be encouraged to take risks for peace.

Nowhere is this more urgent than in Gaza. We wish to see all border crossings fully and immediately opened to normal commercial and humanitarian traffic, so that the unacceptable humanitarian conditions prevailing in Gaza can be addressed. We have all been shocked by the violence and widespread civilian casualties which took place during the conflict in Gaza at the start of this year. There must be some form of accountability for the most serious violations of international law which occurred at that time. The Human Rights Council is now addressing this issue in considering the comprehensive report prepared by Justice Goldstone and his team.

IRAN

Like many others in the international community, Ireland has followed recent events in Iran with mounting concern.

I urge Iran to comply fully with all its obligations and commitments in terms of protecting the basic human rights of its citizens. It is equally urgent that Iran responds to the demands of the international community to cease uranium enrichment and to answer satisfactorily all questions regarding its nuclear activities, particularly in light of the latest revelations regarding the previously undisclosed nuclear site at Qom. The international community is ready to engage with Iran and has made generous offers. It is for Iran to decide whether it wishes to pursue the path of engagement or to opt for increasing isolation. We very much hope that the forthcoming discussions on 1 October with Iran will mark the start of a constructive engagement on the major issues of international concern.

SUDAN/DARFUR

The continuing humanitarian tragedy of Darfur horrifies world opinion and cannot be ignored. I want to pay tribute to the UN and international humanitarian staff, who are working tirelessly and selflessly under the most difficult of circumstances. I think in particular of Sharon Commins and Hilda Kuwuki, two brave and dedicated aid workers with the Irish agency GOAL, who were kidnapped in Darfur on 3 July. The Irish Government is grateful for all the assistance we have received from the UN and others in our efforts to secure the release of these two women. We fervently hope that the day of their release from captivity is not far off.

The people of Darfur and of Sudan richly deserve peace. We must all collectively continue working to promote the UN-African Union mediation in Darfur, to support full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and to ensure that justice and the defence of human rights prevail throughout Sudan.

BURMA/MYANMAR

In Burma/Myanmar, Ireland condemns the recent conviction of Aung San Suu Kyi and again calls for her immediate release and that of all political prisoners and for the launching of a genuine, inclusive political dialogue. International pressure is needed on Burma's leaders, notably from other countries in the region, to change course and to move to democracy.

SRI LANKA

In Sri Lanka, there remains an urgent need to improve the humanitarian situation of those fleeing the recent violence in the Tamil areas. The Sri Lankan Government must cooperate fully with the United Nations to alleviate the plight of those affected. It must also work for a political settlement which meets the aspirations of all communities in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION

Mr. President,

As the international community faces up to a formidable array of challenges, there has never been a greater need for the United Nations.

With each new challenge which appears, the value of common action to address it at global level becomes more apparent. There is a much clearer appreciation of this Organisation's potential to deliver an effective response. Let us seize the moment and work together to ensure that the opportunity we have at present is transformed into real achievement.

We can all be justly proud of the record of the United Nations over the past half century. The challenge for us, the Member States, is whether we can mobilise the political will needed in order to ensure that the UN can deliver even more in the future.

Ireland, for its part, commits itself to doing everything in its power to realise the full potential of the United Nations, this unique voice of the international community, in the pursuit of a better and safer world.

Thank you.