



HOLY SEE

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**Address by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore
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**General Debate of the
63rd session of the General Assembly
of the United Nations**

New York, 29 September 2008

Mr President,

As you assume the presidency of this 63rd session of the General Assembly, my delegation wishes you all the best in your endeavors and looks forward to working with you in order to address the many challenges facing the global community.

This general debate is an occasion for those responsible for the national life of every country to come together to get the pulse of the world situation. By its nature and structure, the United Nations normally creates neither the events nor the trends, but rather, serves as a sounding board where events and trends are submitted for debate and a coherent, consensual and timely response.

This year has been dominated by a number of challenges and crises: natural and man-made calamities, staggering economies, financial turmoil, rising food and fuel prices, the impact of climate change, local wars and tensions. We have been called to this Hall once again to identify the common causes and denominators underlying these diverse crises and to craft adequate long-term solutions.

One of the clear facts recognized by all is that every crisis presents a mixture of natural factors and elements of human responsibility. However, these are all too often compounded by tardy response, failures or reluctance of leaders to exercise their responsibility to protect their populations.

When speaking within these walls of the responsibility to protect, the common understanding of the term is found in the 2005 Outcome Document, which refers to the responsibility of the international community to intervene in situations where individual governments are not able or willing to assure the protection of their own citizens.

In the past, the language of “protection” was too often a pretext for expansion and aggression. In spite of the many advancements in international law, this same understanding and practice tragically continues today.

However, during the past year in this same Hall, there has been growing consensus and greater inclusion of this expression as a vital component of responsible leadership. The responsibility to protect has been invoked by some as an essential aspect of the exercise of sovereignty at the national and international levels, while others have re-launched the concept of the exercise of responsible sovereignty.

For his part, Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations last April, also recognized that from the very ancient philosophical discourses on governance to the more modern development of the nation-state, the responsibility to protect has served and must continue to serve as the principle shared by all nations to govern their populations and regulate relations between peoples. These statements highlight the historical and moral basis for States to govern. Likewise, they reassert that good governance should no longer be measured simply within the context of “state’s rights” or “sovereignty” but rather, by its ability to care for those who entrust leaders with the grave moral responsibility to lead.

The “we the peoples” who formed the United Nations conceived the responsibility to protect to serve as the core basis for the United Nations. The founding leaders believed that the responsibility to protect would consist not primarily in the use of force to restore peace and human rights, but above all, in States coming together to detect and denounce the early symptoms of every kind of crises and mobilize the attention of governments, civil society and public opinion to find the causes and offer solutions. The various agencies and bodies of the United Nations also reaffirm the importance of the responsibility to protect in their ability to work in close proximity and solidarity with affected populations and to put into place mechanisms of detection, implementation and monitoring.

It is incumbent not only upon States, but also the United Nations, to ensure that the responsibility to protect serves as the underlying measure and motivation of all its work.

While many continue to question and debate the real causes and medium and long term consequences of the various financial, humanitarian and food crises around the world, the United Nations and its membership have the responsibility to provide direction, coherence, and resolution. At stake is not only the credibility of this Organization and global leaders but, more importantly, the ability of the human community to provide food and security and to protect basic human rights so that all peoples have the opportunity to live with freedom from fear and want and thus realize their inherent dignity.

One area in which our best intentions require urgent action is climate change. My delegation commends Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his leadership in recognizing the urgency to tackle this issue and we commend States and civil society in making the necessary political and personal sacrifices to ensure a better future.

The challenge of climate change and the various solutions proposed and put into action, bring us to point out a preoccupation and inconsistency that exist today in the realm of international and national law, namely, that all that is technically possible must be legally licit.

In adopting ever more stringent norms to protect the environment and nature, it is often rightly affirmed that not all environmental activity should be allowed and sanctioned by law just because it is technically possible and economically profitable. Indiscriminate deforestation, the dumping of radioactive waste and invasive and devastating acts on nature are often more expedient and technically possible, but because they provoke our conscience as well as our responsibility towards creation, we come to the decision to invoke the principle that even though it is possible it should not be legally licit.

However, when passing from the ecological field to that of humans we have a tendency to affirm the opposite principle, namely, that all which is technically possible should be legally licit and consequently pursued. Whether it regards the production of arms for war, biotechnological engineering, the taking of human life, reproductive technology or the structure of the family itself, we have the tendency to advocate that all which is technologically possible should also be legally licit. This inconsistency calls into question whether we truly place humans at the center of decision making.

The global community must come together to reverse this contradiction and engage in a political discourse that recognizes the centrality of humans in all aspects of political and technological development. The same principles that lead us to oppose unchecked technology and policies that destroy the environment, should also guide us in our prudent use of technologies and creation of policies which directly impact the lives of individuals. Short of that, we will succumb to an inconsistency that penalizes the individual and human society, and risks paving the way toward the imposition of laws by the more powerful and the creation of a new mass of losers.

Mr President,

As we embark on this session of the General Assembly we strive to fashion an Organization which reflects our highest and best intentions and carefully places the needs of all people, regardless of their economic and political standing, at the center of our decisions and responsibility.