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STATEMENT

BY THE

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND
COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

OF THE

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND
NORTHERN IRELAND,

THE RT HON MARGARET BECKETT MP

BEFORE THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL
ASSEMBLY ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2006

UN General Assembly Speech – check against delivery

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett M.P.

New York

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Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. First I would like to pay tribute to the work of the Secretary General. A former British Minister once said of the NATO Secretary-General that he should be more of a Secretary and less of a General. Kofi Annan has been more of everything. More of a diplomat, more of a reformer, more of a moral voice of leadership in the world.

2. In a world shattered by conflict the founders of the United Nations saw that only by coming together – united in support of larger freedom – could we build our shared future.

3. Today when the world's nations are even more interdependent than they were in 1945, what does it mean to stand, as they intended, united?

4. At one level it means taking action when things go wrong: where there is an actual breakdown of security, a descent into violence or chaos. Today, in particular, the UN faces the challenges posed by multiple upheavals and crises across the world.

5. In the Middle East, the United Nations is playing a vital role in establishing stability in Southern Lebanon. Troops from the European Union are deploying alongside those from the Middle East, Asia and Africa. All member states must meet their obligations under UNSCRs 1701, 1559 and 1680 if we are to enable Lebanon to be the proud, democratic and diverse nation that its people want it to be.

6. But we are all aware that this most recent conflict in Lebanon had its roots in the continuing failure to achieve a just solution to the Palestinian question. That is why the UK has consistently argued that there can be no higher priority than reinvigorating the Middle East Peace Process.

7. In Iraq, Prime Minister Maliki's National Reconciliation Plan can help leaders from all communities come together. At this crucial juncture, we must all intensify our support. The International Compact provides the right vehicle: it allows the Iraqi government to set its own vision and shows us how we can help turn that vision into a reality.

8. In Afghanistan, real progress has been made, with the UN taking a leading role in co-ordinating the international effort. But real challenges still lie ahead: NATO's task of securing the south of country is far from easy and soldiers from many NATO countries, not least my own, have given their lives to provide a better future for the people of Afghanistan. The Afghan government and people too want security, development and good governance. The UK and the international community are determined to help them achieve them.

9. We must show a similar shared determination in urging the government of Iran to address international concerns over its nuclear ambitions and its support for terrorism. The proposals put forward by Britain, France and Germany, and China, Russia and the United States offer a path for the Iranian government to develop a more normal relationship with the rest of the world and give Iran's talented population the opportunities and prosperity that is their right – including if they wish a modern nuclear power industry. We want to be able to resume negotiations. Iran knows what's required, and that alternative is increasing isolation.

10. Darfur remains in crisis. I pay tribute to the efforts of the African Union and its peacekeepers. Wednesday's decision to extend their mandate averted a security vacuum; we must now reinforce AMIS, the African Union force. . But it can only be a temporary reprieve. We also need action immediately on the political and humanitarian front. Those who have not signed the Darfur Peace Agreement must do so. Those who have must abide by its provisions.

11. To underpin that agreement, we urgently need a greatly strengthened international presence on the ground, with the active engagement and support of Asian and Muslim, as well as African, countries. That is why the Security Council authorised the deployments of UN peacekeepers to Darfur. I urge President Bashir to extend Sudan's relations with the United Nations in a common purpose to bring lasting peace, and genuine stability to the whole of Sudan. It is above all his responsibility.

Madam President

12. The security challenges the world faces are real. As an international community we must deal with them. But standing united also requires us to take up a second, deeper level of global responsibility: tackling the underlying problems that promote conflict and underdevelopment. We must strive to promote sound global values and to build multilateral systems within which nations and individuals can co-operate, co-exist and each achieve their potential.

13. Many delegates to this Assembly have already spoken of the need to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

14. Progress on these goals is a moral imperative, rooted in a concern for and an understanding of our common humanity. But it is also a political imperative. Because there will be no stability and security in our global community while so many millions of men, women and children in that community face only a life of hunger, poverty, inequality and disease.

15. The same is true for those whose lives are shattered by conflict or blighted by injustice. The Peacebuilding Commission and Human Rights Council are new structures which give us new opportunity and new impetus. And at the same time we must see a step change in efforts towards an international Arms Trade Treaty that will end the irresponsible transfer of arms that fuel conflict and facilitate the abuse of human rights. That is why the United Kingdom, with six

other countries, will introduce a resolution in the First Committee to establish a process working towards a legally binding treaty on the trade in all conventional arms.

Madam President

16. Collectively we have a responsibility to protect human life and a duty to defend the international institutions that help us as a community to achieve that goal. The answers do not lie in division or in personal attacks but in the earnest and consistent pursuit of justice and peace.

17. Our collective responsibility to each other is nowhere more evident than in the huge challenge posed by climate change. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair made climate change one of our two G8 priorities last year, alongside poverty reduction in Africa. When the Prime Minister appointed me as his Foreign Secretary in May, he specifically charged me with putting climate security at the heart of our foreign policy.

18. We will not solve this problem if we do not each take our share of the responsibility for tackling it. Nobody can protect themselves from climate change unless we protect each other by building a global basis for climate security. This goes to the heart of the UN's mission. And the UN must be at the heart of the solution.

19. To put it starkly, if we all try to free ride, we will all end up in free fall, with accelerating climate change the result of our collective failure to respond in time to this shared threat.

20. Look just at the danger posed by rising sea levels: potentially this could cause massive damage to some of the key urban centres of our global civilization: London, Shanghai, Dhaka, Singapore, Amsterdam, Cairo, and – yes - Manhattan - all are at risk.

21. That is why we must all – as foreign ministers, heads of government, heads of state – be ready to do more and do it more quickly. Our climate presents us with an

ever-growing threat to international security. Dealing with climate change – both adapting to what is now inevitable and acting to avert still greater damage – is no longer a choice, it is an imperative.

22. We need common commitment and genuine action. We must all be ready to find a way to get the agenda moving – beyond Kyoto. The Gleneagles Dialogue meeting in Mexico at the beginning of October is one such opportunity: a chance for developed and developing countries to work together on this shared problem.

23. If we do not act now, an unstable climate will undermine our progress in all those other areas that matter to us. Take one of the most basic needs of all: water. Already perhaps two-fifths of the world's population find it hard to get the water they need. At the same time many in the world rely on affordable energy to help lift themselves out of poverty – and indeed perhaps give them access to that water. But there is a dilemma: if we provide affordable energy by burning fossil fuels, we accelerate climate change. And this means further disrupting water supplies. For some people who now have plenty of water it will mean new shortages. For those who already have little, it will mean less. And, in turn, everywhere less water means less food.

24. Or here is another, more specific example of that same dilemma. The whole world, as well as the Chinese people, is benefiting from the great success of the Chinese economy. No-one in China, or elsewhere, wants this growth to stop. But it is based, in China as elsewhere, on a rapidly increasing use of the fossil fuels which are creating climate change.

25. Yet China is a country already vulnerable to climate change. The Chinese government knows that as the Himalayan glaciers melt and agricultural land shrinks, crop yields will fall, fresh water become more scarce – and the economy itself will suffer.

26. All the nations of the Arctic Circle are being, and will be, affected by melting permafrost. We all share, to a greater or lesser extent, the dilemma. If we don't act on climate change, we risk undermining the very basis of the prosperity and security we are seeking to achieve. That is why we must recognise

that talk of having either a successful economy or a stable climate is a false choice; we must work together to find paths for economic growth which protect our climate.

27. The truth is that we already have much of the technology we need to move to a low carbon economy. But we must now deploy it very much more rapidly. What we do in the next ten years will count the most.

28. The former chief economist of the World Bank, Sir Nicholas Stern, will shortly publish one of the most significant and wide-reaching analyses so far of the economic impacts of climate change. One of the key emerging findings of his work is that while it won't cost the earth to solve climate change, it will cost the earth, literally and financially, if we don't.

29. Moreover, if we learn to tackle climate change together, we have an opportunity to build trust between nations and to strengthen the multilateral system. But if we get it wrong that trust will be further eroded. It is the developed, rich world which bears a large responsibility for the present level of greenhouse gas emissions. But it is the poorest in our global community – those least able to bear it – who will bear the brunt of climate insecurity. We all need to do more – but the rich world should continue to lead the effort, applying the principle of common but differentiated responsibility which must continue to be our guide.

30. In the joint endeavour which the United Nations represents there can be no more stark – or urgent – warning than that.