

H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH UPON HIS ELECTION AS PRESIDENT

NEW YORK, 13 JUNE 2005

Mr. President, Colleagues and Friends,

I am touched and honoured to be elected President of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

I am deeply grateful for the support given to Sweden's candidature by the Member States of our regional group and by all of you today. Your support takes on a special significance for my country, since the legendary Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was born in Jönköping, Sweden, this year one hundred years ago.

At the outset, let me pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his untiring and dedicated work and for his courage and vision in presenting us, the Member States, with "In Larger Freedom", the most comprehensive and cohesive proposal to strengthen the United Nations since the birth of the Organization.

The President of the General Assembly has now, after consultations with the Member States, transformed this proposal into a draft declaration for us to consider and for our Heads of State and Government to adopt at the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, 14-16 September. It is incumbent upon all of us to deal with this proposed declaration thoroughly, creatively and with a commitment to accept global responsibility. The wise and decisive leadership of President Ping — at many crossroads and difficult choices — has been and will be key to the success of this highly important September meeting.

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Today, we are all of us facing a test of multilateralism.

Will we develop the concepts and methods to deal with global problems in this age of rapid globalization? Will we be able to make the UN system a more effective actor on the world scene? These are major, even historic, tasks for our peoples, societies and Governments as well as for all of us here at the UN, we the practitioners of multilateral diplomacy.

Our main task now is to accept, and live up to, the triple challenges of development, security and human rights. The three are intertwined and affect and reinforce each other.

Let us remember the calls of the Preamble of the UN Charter "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours" and "to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security" as well as "to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples". I continue to be impressed with the wisdom and far-sightedness of the framers of the Charter. Let us commit ourselves to work in their spirit.

But let us also work with our eyes directed to the realities of this world. Let us place the human beings and the real problems in the centre — and organize ourselves accordingly. Let us always keep in mind the words “we the peoples” in the Preamble of the Charter.

The litmus test and the measuring rod for UN reforms must be the difference they make for people and crisis areas around the world: for the starving child, the AIDS-stricken mother, the war-torn country, the polluted river, the desperate refugee, the oppressed and neglected and, not to forget, the struggling and unselfish humanitarian workers of the UN and the NGOs as well as the UN and regional peacekeepers. What I would call “field tests” should be applied to all reform proposals.

I have strong personal memories from my time as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and from many natural and man-made disasters around the world. The nightmare of Somalia 1992-1993 will forever remind me of the urgent need for prevention, for early action and for effectively dealing with civil wars and the tormenting ethnic and religious conflicts. We cannot, after Cambodia, Rwanda, Srebrenica and Darfur, continue to say “never again” without seriously undermining the moral authority of the UN and its Charter.

I will in my Presidency also be guided by values and principles which are pillars of Sweden’s foreign policy: belief in multilateral cooperation, the imperative of prevention, respect for the rule of law and human rights, solidarity with the poor and persecuted, and concern for the rights of women, for the children of the world and their future, and indeed, for the health of Planet Earth. These aspirations, I know, are shared by people and nations in all regions of the world.

I strongly believe that regional organizations and cooperation should be strengthened and energized as a result of the reform efforts in the UN. Regional arrangements form an integral part of the UN Charter and must be important elements in a necessary international division of labour in this time of many pressing issues and demands around the world.

United Nations is not a panacea or a universal cure. It reflects the collective political will of the Member States and their interest in strengthening the multilateral system. Effective international norms and structures should be seen to be in every nation’s national interest.

In order to achieve this, we must offer international solutions and methods which correspond to the needs of today’s world: fighting poverty, diseases, organized crime, trafficking, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and environmental degradation, as well as preventing and resolving conflicts and stopping mass killing, torture and abuse. For this we have to sharpen the tools of the UN and develop concepts which reflect our preparedness to face, and act on, these fundamental challenges.

This is the essence of the reform project of the UN: building a UN which effectively and legitimately responds to the urgent needs around the world and adds value to our work for security, prosperity and a life in dignity for all. Making real progress to reach this end would be our most important contribution to the historic test of multilateralism which we are now facing.

If we at the UN pass this test, we will not only enhance the prospects for effective international cooperation. We will also be able to more effectively deal with widening gaps and dangerous imbalances. And, on a deeper level, we could instil hope, and belief in the future, in a world of growing fear and suspicion. We must mobilize political will to change negative trends and to prevent polarization and pessimism. And we must realize that we have the opportunity and the capacity to do so at this moment of history.

In a spirit of dialogue and transparency, I will as President of the sixtieth General Assembly work together with all of you in this common endeavour. Let us bring out the full potential of this central body, the General Assembly, and let us together build a strengthened UN.

In our daily work, toiling with UN reform in the committees, meeting rooms and secretariat offices, let us be inspired by Dag Hammarskjöld's words in his book *Markings* (or, in direct translation from Swedish, "Waymarks") on the need for vision and a long-term perspective:

"Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step: only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find his right road."