

Remarks by  
His Excellency Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann  
President of the United Nations General Assembly  
at the opening of the General Debate  
United Nations, New York  
23 September 2008

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- Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
- Vice-Presidents, Ministers for Foreign Affairs and other representatives of the 192 States Members of our Organization,
- Mr. Secretary-General,
- Dear friends,

1. It is a great honour for me to address you at the opening of the general debate of this sixty-third session of the General Assembly. The international situation at this point in time is far from satisfactory. In fact, the world is in even more serious trouble than it was 63 years ago when the United Nations was founded.

2. Right now we are witnessing a confluence of large-scale, interrelated crises. But crises need not necessarily turn into tragedies. This is a time of tremendous opportunities to introduce corrective measures to improve our way of doing things, of interacting with one another and with Mother Earth and the natural world in general.

3. If we are to seize the opportunities that these crises now offer, we must move beyond lamentations, speech-making and statements of good intentions and take concrete action based on a firm resolve to

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replace the individualism and selfishness of the dominant culture with human solidarity as the golden rule that guides our behaviour.

4. Our Organization has done many laudable things which, had the United Nations not existed, surely could not have been done.

5. However, if we look at the Organization's progress in fulfilling the primary purposes for which it was founded, we must admit that in terms of eliminating war, achieving disarmament and ensuring international security, we have failed.

6. In signing the Charter of the United Nations, all of us undertook to uphold certain principles which, if they had truly been upheld by all Member States, would have placed the world in a much better position today to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

7. The world — our world — is ailing and its illness is the one that Tolstoy described more than 100 years ago as the "mania of selfishness".

8. Some say that this is irreversible—that it is too late to do anything about it. I think this attitude is one of dangerous defeatism that will only paralyse us and guarantee that we keep sinking, until we drown, in the morass of maniacal, suicidal selfishness in which we find ourselves.

9. More than half the world's people languish in hunger and poverty while at the same time more and more money is spent on weapons, wars, luxuries and totally superfluous and unnecessary things. We must resist the temptation to bury our heads in the sand in an attempt to deny reality. Let us be brave enough to acknowledge the vast inequities that exist in the world and within most of our countries, even in many of the most developed countries. These inequities are time bombs that will not simply go away if we ignore them.

10. In addition to the problem of hunger, poverty and high food prices, there are many other problems whose human origin can no longer be doubted. These include climate change, efforts to privatize water and the squandering of water as though it were an inexhaustible resource, the arms build-up, terrorism, human trafficking, the Palestine situation, humanitarian aid, gender inequality and children in especially difficult circumstances such as armed conflict or humanitarian disaster.

11. These are the most pressing problems that our world faces today. All of them are man-made, and all can be traced in large part to the lack of democracy at the United Nations. A small group of States take decisions based on selfish motives, and the world's poor are the ones who suffer the consequences.

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12. The decisions with the most serious consequences for the membership do not go through the General Assembly. In any event, the resolutions of the General Assembly — that is, of the representatives of "we the peoples", in whose name our Organization was founded — are regarded as mere recommendations that are casually ignored even though they represent the wishes of 95 per cent of the Organization's Members.

13. The current financial crisis, on top of the high cost of food and the humanitarian devastation caused by recurrent natural phenomena, will have very serious consequences that will impede significant progress, if indeed any progress is made, towards the targets established in the Millennium Development Goals, which are themselves insufficient. It is always the poor who pay the price for the unbridled greed and irresponsibility of the powerful.

Dear brothers and sisters,

14. The world has reached a point at which we have no alternative— either we love one another or we all perish; either we treat each other as brothers and sisters or we witness the beginning of the end of our human species. If we choose the path of solidarity, recognizing each

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other as brothers and sisters, we will open up new horizons of life and hope for everyone.

15. This is what the peoples of the entire world, particularly the dispossessed of this Earth, hope to hear from this distinguished gathering of some 100 Heads of State and Government. They want to hear a universal commitment to defending the United Nations, on the understanding that this entails respecting and defending the principles on which our Organization is based. First among them is the principle of the sovereign equality of all Member States; second is the obligation of all Members to meet their Charter obligations. Failure to do so would be not only a serious breach of international commitments; it would amount to an attack on the United Nations and its ability to work effectively for peace.

16. The United Nations has officially proclaimed 2009 the International Year of Reconciliation. Starting today, we must begin to adopt that mindset. We should emerge from this general debate in a state of reconciliation, determined to stop treating each other arrogantly and to stop attacking each other. We must forgive those who might have caused us great pain and suffering but who are now pledged to refrain from attacking us again.

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17. Forgiveness is never a sign of weakness. On the contrary, great spiritual strength is needed to forgive and to refuse to let memories of past abuses become obstacles to achieving the levels of unity and solidarity we need in order to build a new world—in the conviction that a different world is possible.

18. In a moment I will have the great honour and privilege of inviting each of you, one by one, to present, as representatives of the States Members of our Organization, your vision of how we should address the great challenges of the day and how we can achieve the unity we need in order to do so effectively.

19. The first representative whom I will, with great pride and pleasure, be calling upon to take the floor is a very dear friend of many years, President Lula of Brazil, the largest country in my extended homeland of Latin America and the Caribbean.

20. Immediately afterward I will have the great honour to call upon our dear brother President Bush and to shake his hand. What he has to say to us will be of great importance to the world. After that I will call upon our very dear brother President Sarkozy of France, who is also the current President of the European Union. Next will come the Presidents of the Philippines, Gabon, Bahrain, my homeland of

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Nicaragua, Liberia, Turkey, Argentina, Madagascar, Serbia and the United Republic of Tanzania, who is also the current President of the African Union. I am sure that the spirit of our dear brother and friend Julius Nyerere will be with us, helping us to achieve the noble aims of this general debate.

21. These introductory remarks are made from the heart. They are meant as a kind of fraternal embrace for all of you, without exception, *in caritate non ficta*, with love unfeigned, to echo a phrase of the Apostle Paul that has always been a favourite of mine.

Thank you.