
SPEECH BY BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI

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Welcome. Welcome, all of you, to United Nations Headquarters in New York. Meetings such as yours are not frequent in this House. But your request to hold the Congress of the Socialist International here, at the United Nations, seemed symbolic in a number of ways.

First, beyond any ideological considerations, the social issues with which you are concerned are also fundamental concerns of the United Nations. In its Preamble, the Charter of the United Nations affirms the Organisation's determination to "*promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom*".

A year and a half ago, at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen, the international community stated the great importance it attaches to social development. In so doing, it affirmed its mobilisation against social injustice, against exclusion and against poverty. We cannot accept that the world, advancing ever more rapidly in progress and development, should leave by the wayside more than a billion men, women and children, living lives of utter despair. The international community meeting at Copenhagen reaffirmed its commitment to social issues as global priorities. It called upon the United Nations to take its rightful place in ensuring the common future of humanity. It asked the United Nations to rise to the challenge of promoting solidarity around the globe. I know you share this goal of the United Nations, this goal which has become a priority of the international community.

Second, I welcome your presence here today because of my understanding of the increasingly important role of 'the new international actors' in international affairs. Sovereign states are not the only actors in the international system. The international community now includes actors who must confront transnational issues. The international system can no longer be seen as a static political system. It must now account for a world in constant movement. Movements of wealth, movements of persons, movements of capital and the dissemination of ideas and skills are as crucial to an understanding of the world as the study of the dynamics of territorial conquest was in earlier times.

We must therefore now conceive of an international system shaped by the policies of states, the behaviour of economic agents and the aspirations of social actors. In other words, non-governmental organisations and institutions such as yours, constitute a key element of today's world. The new international actors have, I believe, a three-fold role to play, a three-fold mission to accomplish. They must be, simultaneously: a mobilising force for international public opinion; a stimulus for the work of the United Nations; and an element in the democratisation of the international system. Mobilising international public opinion is a vital aspect of working for peace, development and human rights. I therefore congratulate you on your choice of themes for your deliberations here.

As you know, the end of the cold war has, in some cases, led to perverse consequences. Some parts of the world have suddenly lost all strategic interest for the great powers. The latent world crisis has aroused nationalist self-interest and encouraged, on the part of some industrialised states, an inward-looking temptation. The terrible sight of civil strife and dissension in the poorest countries has often discouraged developed states from pursuing their assistance. The result has been that today, some feel greatly tempted to allow the poorest regions, left to their own devices, to sink into economic underdevelopment or political chaos.

As Secretary-General, I have sometimes found it difficult to convince member states to undertake particular peace-keeping operations, or development-cooperation activities. I know that public opinion can be of great assistance in helping states commit themselves to the noble ideals of the Charter. And the new international actors can help shape public opinion.

It is therefore from this perspective that I ask you to help us where public opinion is concerned. Without the support of public opinion, the United Nations is nothing. Its effectiveness declines. Its very legitimacy is diminished - for it is public opinion that allows states to express strong political will. The mobilisation capacity of the new international actors is therefore extremely important.

But even more than this, the representatives of international civil society can in themselves be a stimulus for the action of the United Nations. Indeed through their initiatives, their imagination, their diversity, their enthusiasm, these new actors can contribute to enrich the thinking carried out under the auspices of the world organisation, because they can bring to light new sensitivities, propose new approaches, and thus bring discourse in the United Nations closer to the real lives of men and women in the world.

This concrete experience is one which we have shared together in recent years. As you know, since 1992, the United Nations has been involved in a

vast discussion about the economic and social future of the planet.

By means of the Rio Conference on the environment, the Vienna Conference on human rights, the Copenhagen Conference on social development, the Cairo Conference on population, the Beijing Conference on women, and more recently the Istanbul Conference on the urban habitat, the United Nations has been conducting an unprecedented exploration into the makings of the global society in which we are called upon to live.

This reflexion requires the participation of all men and women. And I mean not only the member states of the world organisation but also of the non-governmental organisations and of a variety of associations that represent new types of solidarity.

At each of these international conferences, we have fully valued and appreciated the contributions of these new actors in international life. Their participation is all the more important, given our clear awareness of the fact that the major problems of the human situation are essentially transnational problems.

And people with your political responsibilities must be fully convinced of this!

In fact, whether it is the protection of the environment, control of the future demographics, the struggle against AIDS, the regulation of international migrations, the battle against transnational crime, or our actions against international terrorism, it is obvious today that these questions will arise henceforth at a planetary level and that they can be grasped only partially at the level of the nation state.

I therefore hope more than ever before that these new actors on the international stage are able to participate fully in this exploration being conducted by the United Nations. Because in a certain way, they will guarantee the legitimacy of the decisions taken on behalf of the international community.

This is why I also wish to affirm that these new actors participate in an essential way in the democratisation of international life.

For several years I have been insisting on the place which the democratic imperative should hold in the international order. On many occasions I have stressed the need for the United Nations to accompany the democratisation processes, and not only within states, but also between states, and within the international system as a whole.

For democracy to have real meaning it must be a possibility wherever there is a concentration of power; at the national level of course, but also at the international level and now at the transnational level as well.

Democracy is not only a form of government of a state or between states.

Democracy should be the way in which all power, of whatever kind, is exercised in contemporary international society.

Because it seems indeed important to me, faced with the globalisation of international life, not only to promote the democratic idea but also to think of it in global terms.

In other words, I wish once again to state that the phenomenon of globalisation of the economy should go hand-in-hand with a move towards globalisation of democracy, a democracy which respects the political and social aspirations of all citizens, men and women alike.

It is by fully instilling the democratic idea in our international life that the new forms of solidarity called for by the present world situation may be constantly better expressed and developed.

We are in fact all convinced that only a new concept of solidarity will make it possible to avoid - or at least to reduce - the new forms of exclusion inherent in a global society.

But solidarity cannot be decreed! Solidarity is first and foremost the deep conviction of belonging to the same world!

Solidarity is also the wish to base the future on a new social covenant.

Solidarity can therefore only be the result of a collective commitment, that is to say, of the participation of all the members of contemporary international society.

It is in this context that the new actors in international life have an essential role to play in the process of democratising global society.

That is the reason why I hope that everywhere, and within the United Nations itself, non-governmental organisations will play an increasingly important role.

In these few words, as well as a message of welcome, I have tried to convey to you the importance I attach to what are sometimes called non-state actors in international life.

For a long time now, the Socialist International has shown its interest in the work of the United Nations. Your consultative status in the Economic and Social Council is the clearest institutional proof of this.

And on many occasions you have shown your commitment to the principles and the objectives of the Charter.

Today once again, in basing your reflexions and your work on strengthening the objectives of the United Nations, you are clearly displaying your commitment to our international organisation. And I should say, to be more precise, to your international organisation.

This support is all the more important since the United Nations is today going through a particular crisis.

A financial crisis certainly, everyone knows.

But also - and this may be more serious - a political crisis, an unprecedented political crisis!

I therefore need the support of all of you. I need the support of all those men and women whom the preamble of the Charter aptly names the peoples of the United Nations. I need you.

Because we are at a very crucial moment where it is essential to renew our faith in the ideals of the Charter, and our confidence in a strong and independent international organisation, an international organisation whose purpose is to accord an ever higher place to the ideal of peace, development and solidarity.

I wish you very fruitful work which I will follow with the utmost attention.