



Speech for

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Ambassador and Permanent Representative
to the United Nations

Country Statement to the
62nd United Nations General Assembly

The United Nations: Taking Action

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(Check Against Delivery)

SALUTATIONS

Mr President

I join my colleagues in congratulating you on your election as President of the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I would also like to wish Secretary-General Ban well for his first General Assembly as Secretary-General.

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Australian Government let me begin by re-affirming Australia's longstanding call for reform to the United Nations. Australia strongly supports efforts to make the United Nations more effective. And Australia would like to acknowledge Secretary-General Ban's push for reform so far.

But reform of the United Nations is not an end itself. We must reform the United Nations so that it can act decisively to meet global challenges. Simply talking about issues does not solve problems.

Over the past 60 years when the United Nations has acted, it has proved its worth.

UN peacekeeping operations around the world have saved lives and helped communities rebuild. Australia has a proud history of supporting them. Australia was the first country on the ground in what was arguably the first ever UN peacekeeping operation, the 1947 Consular Commission to Indonesia. In the past 60 years Australia has made contributions to 39 UN peacekeeping operations. And we continue this tradition today.

The United Nations, as the only organisation with truly global membership, has both a unique opportunity to meet challenges and a responsibility to take action. By coming together, we can achieve more than each of our countries could on its own. The United Nations has great moral authority. But if it fails to act decisively, that authority will be squandered.

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

As members of the United Nations, we have set ourselves important goals over the past 62 years: maintaining global peace and security, supporting economic and social development and advancing human rights. In 2005 we pledged to protect those people who are most vulnerable – those facing genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. We recognised the “responsibility to protect” as a central tenet of our shared humanity.

This “responsibility to protect” underpins the notion that States must protect their own populations. But if they should fail to do so, the international community has a responsibility to act; not to stand idly by in the face of atrocity, genocide or ethnic cleansing.

For the international community, this means we must commit to prevent – and respond to – these most serious of crimes, wherever they occur.

And after the immediate crisis has passed, we must support recovery efforts to help communities rebuild and reconcile by addressing the causes of the crisis.

Last year the Security Council drew upon the responsibility to protect for the first time in a country-specific resolution, Resolution 1706 on Darfur.

And under subsequent Resolution 1769 an African Union/United Nations hybrid peacekeeping operation was established with a robust mandate to protect civilians and humanitarian workers.

The international community must now ensure the deployment of the hybrid force proceeds quickly. Active cooperation is needed across the international community if we are to keep our promise to the people of Darfur. The alternative – to fail – is unthinkable. This is a test for the United Nations and its member states.

But resolving the tragedy in Darfur is, first and foremost, a test for the Government of Sudan and other parties to the conflict. Ongoing military operations by the Government of Sudan – and last weekend's killing and abduction of African Union peacekeepers by rebel forces – demonstrate the urgent need for the parties to stop these crimes and build peace. Those who have committed crimes in Darfur must be punished.

Australia calls on the Government of Sudan to act on the warrants issued by the International Criminal Court. We call on Sudan to arrest Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs, Ahmad Harun, and militia leader Ali Kushayb and hand them over to the Court.

Darfur is not the only humanitarian crisis we have experienced or will face in the United Nations. Tragically, other populations will also require protection from crimes against humanity. The responsibility to protect provides the necessary guide to action. But it is up to Security Council members, on behalf of the international community, to act, and for all UN members to support them.

THE NEED TO ACT

Mr President

The events of the past week in Burma remind us of the irrepressible human impulse to seek democratic freedoms and human rights.

The United Nations and individual countries must let the courageous protestors in Burma know that their message is understood – a message on the need to move towards genuine democratic progress and national reconciliation, and away from military domination.

Australia has joined the international community in condemning the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations by monks and civilians. We call for the immediate release of those arrested for exercising their fundamental human rights to peaceful protest and for humane treatment of all those detained. Australia is also introducing targeted financial measures against members of the Burmese regime and its supporters to increase pressure on them to engage in genuine political reform and national reconciliation.

Australia supports the consistent efforts that the United Nations has made to monitor and improve the situation in Burma. We welcomed the statement issued by the UN Security Council following its special consultations on 26 September.

We welcome the current visit to Burma by UNSG Special Envoy Professor Gambari and his access to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We urge the Burmese authorities to work constructively and meaningfully with him in support of his UN mandated mission. Professor Gambari is well placed to assist in achieving a peaceful resolution to the current crisis.

Mr President

The “responsibility to protect” means we, the international community, must act when confronted with the most serious of crimes. But we also have to act to confront the range of global challenges we face – from terrorism and climate change to poverty.

Terrorists stand in stark contrast to those of us who seek to protect the vulnerable. Their goals are global and their reach transnational – no single country can solve the problem alone.

There has been some success in combating terrorist networks, but we need to develop even more effective strategies to disrupt and dismantle their networks.

Australia calls on member states of the United Nations to implement fully all relevant Security Council resolutions on freezing the assets of terrorists. Terrorist organisations must be starved of their funds and support.

Australia also calls on member states to conclude a comprehensive convention against terrorism as soon as possible. A convention would provide a solid foundation for international cooperation to prevent, prosecute and punish terrorist acts.

The international community must support the efforts of states that fight terrorism – in particular, fledgling democratic states. We must help these states to establish strong democratic institutions and accountable government structures – as state weakness can allow terrorism to fester.

We should cooperate to prevent man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) falling into the hands of terrorist groups. We should also intensify work on the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. Australia urges member states to join the Initiative.

Mr President

We must also act to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Australia welcomes robust action by the Security Council over the past year in imposing sanctions against programs of proliferation concern in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Iran.

The Security Council's action on the DPRK nuclear issue sent a strong signal to that country that the international community would not tolerate its nuclear programs. We welcome recent progress in the Six-Party Talks. We call on the DPRK to maintain the momentum and implement fully its commitment to denuclearise.

The Security Council also sent a strong message to Iran. We welcome Iran's stated intention to work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to address long outstanding issues. But the international community, including Australia,

remains deeply concerned about Iran's nuclear program. Iran should suspend its uranium enrichment program as required by the Security Council and cooperate fully with the IAEA.

Australia also hopes the United Nations can continue its work in protecting populations by raising barriers against the illicit trade in conventional weapons. We support the development of an Arms Trade Treaty.

Mr President

Climate change is another challenge which clearly requires our urgent attention.

Climate change demands an effective and enduring global response. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is the forum to forge such a global response.

On 9 September, the leaders of APEC's 21 member economies issued the historic Sydney Declaration on Climate Change, Energy Security and Clean Development. The APEC Leaders agreed to work to achieve a common understanding on long-term aspirational goals to reduce emissions and pave the way for an effective post-2012 international arrangement.

Significantly, the APEC Leaders, whose economies represent over half of the world's GDP, agreed that the post-2012 agreement needs to be comprehensive and that all economies should contribute to meeting shared global goals. They also agreed that our responses must be equitable, and environmentally and economically effective, as well as capable of recognising diverse approaches.

The High-Level Climate Change Event, hosted by the Secretary-General on 24 September, and the Meeting of Major Economies, hosted by Secretary Rice on 27-28 September, highlighted these same goals and built additional international momentum for a post-2012 agreement.

Australia calls on Parties to this year's Climate Conference in Bali to agree to a new mandate for the Convention that will move beyond Kyoto and forge a comprehensive new agreement.

The international community must also address pressing health and human security issues – in particular, the spread of HIV/AIDS. Failure to combat HIV/AIDS, will have global economic and social consequences.

Australia takes its responsibility to act seriously, and continues to support our near neighbours in the Asia Pacific region to address the challenge of HIV/AIDS.

As this is a global challenge, so too must be our response. Australia has committed \$A1 billion through to 2010 for international HIV prevention and treatment programs. Australia has fulfilled its \$A75 million pledge to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria over the past four years. And at the Recent Global Fund Replenishment Meeting in Berlin, Australia pledged \$A93 million over two years from 2008-09 building on the \$A42 million already committed for 2007-08.

Mr President

The Australian Government believes that the challenge of ending endemic poverty remains the single most difficult economic and social issue to address – and yet the most fundamental.

In a world where international commerce moves at a click of a button, people should not be starving. Commerce and economic development have the power to lift people out of poverty. And free and open trade helps countries to develop through integration into the world trading system.

We must conclude the Doha Round and deliver results that increase market access and reduce domestic subsidies.

Development assistance, too, plays a key role in alleviating poverty. At the UN Summit in 2005, Australia undertook to double our development assistance budget by 2010. And we are well on the way to achieving that goal.

But this aid must be focused and delivered in a way that promotes broad-based economic growth and encourages good governance. We need to make long-term commitments, particularly in post-conflict development and reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

I have outlined today serious global challenges facing the international community – humanitarian and political crises, including in Darfur and Burma, climate change, poverty, weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.

The Security Council has drawn upon the responsibility to protect principle, endorsed by leaders at the 2005 Summit. It is clear that the international community as a whole has a responsibility to protect those facing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Our task is to respond quickly and effectively. The United Nations has been vested with great authority by its members to effect real change. But this authority will mean little unless we turn commitment into action.

Thank you.