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Statement by

H.E. Mr. Peter Maurer

Ambassador

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Mr President ,

I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr Pascal Couchepin, who had to cancel his trip to New York at the very last minute.

Since its foundation, the United Nations has symbolised the hope of all people to live in peace, freedom and dignity.

As members of the United Nations and as representatives of our peoples, we are under an obligation not to disappoint these hopes.

Three years ago in this chamber we decided to ensure that human beings would live free from want, free from fear and that they would be able to live with dignity.

We must now ask ourselves the following questions:

- Have we kept this promise?
- Have the expectations been fulfilled?
- Have we done enough to bring about peace and security, development and the realisation of human rights?

According to a recent report by the World Bank, the number of people living in poverty has fallen by 500 million since 1981. Their proportion of the total population has fallen from 52% to 26%. Nevertheless, 1.2 billion people still have to get by on less than a dollar a day. 25,000 people a day are dying as a result of starvation and poverty. There are still 67 million refugees and internally displaced persons in the world.

No state, however wealthy or powerful it may be, can tackle all these challenges alone. Common solutions are required. A strong UN is needed, a UN which focuses on that which unites rather than that which divides.

Cooperation across cultural and religious borders is not always easy. Swiss history has shown that this is most likely to bear fruit when specific problems are tackled and solutions are sought in an open dialogue.

This approach is reflected in Swiss peace policy. We support projects whose purpose is to bring together people with different values and cultural backgrounds to enable them to coexist in a positive way. This approach also characterises our activity in the UN-sponsored Alliance of Civilisations.

Although dialogue is necessary, it is only one means of promoting the fundamental values to which we are all attached. I am thinking first of all of human rights, access to a decent standard of living and personal development for everyone.

In this context, Switzerland is participating actively in the work of the Human Rights Council. Let us recall that the value added of the Council will ultimately be judged by the specific contribution that it makes to the protection of human rights on the ground. The universal periodic review and the special procedures provide it with two effective instruments, which need to be used. Switzerland will continue to advocate a constructive and critical universal periodic review, the independence of special procedures and the autonomy of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Next year the Durban review conference will take place. For Switzerland, the fight against racism is a priority, which is why my country will take a full part in this process. However, we expect the preparatory phase to be characterised by a constructive spirit that help us achieve a balanced result. In particular, the review conference should confine itself to the evaluation of the implementation of the Durban Declaration and the Programme of Action. It should not call in question the normative acquis contained in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. And finally it should deal with different subjects relating to racism in a balanced manner, without becoming a platform that focuses on a particular situation.

Mr President,

Last week we talked about the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. We all know that the implementation of these goals is slow and arduous. Collectively, we could have done more, and we *should* have done more. Switzerland is not an exception in this respect. But we are trying to assign our limited means to actions that meet the needs of the recipients, that make a difference to the poorest, that help people to help themselves and that complement – but do not replace – the efforts of the recipient countries. Development aid should be characterised by lasting effectiveness and coherence. The Follow-Up International Conference on Financing for Development in Doha will give us an opportunity to renew and to deepen this alliance between developing and industrialised countries.

Progress for MDGs requires that the poorest in the world are legally better protected. Only if they can defend themselves against injustice, have equal access to justice, property, work and markets will development ultimately be possible. The Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor presented its report a few months ago. It deserves careful study.

Mr President,

The food crisis has undoubtedly made achieving the MDGs more difficult. Switzerland has responded to the crisis by increasing its contribution to the World Food Programme. But the causes of food price rises also need to be tackled. The causes are diverse and range from changing eating habits to increased cultivation of agro-fuel crops and neglect of agricultural production. Measures to resolve this crisis will have to be equally numerous and varied. In this regard, we welcome the efforts made by the high-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis in providing a coherent and efficient response.

However, there is also a positive side to this crisis. Rising food prices may also represent an opportunity, especially for farmers in developing countries. But for this to happen they need access to land and property, to finance and to seed. Likewise they need international rules against the flooding of their sales markets by subsidised

agricultural products, as well as better access to the markets of industrialised countries.

A positive conclusion of the WTO discussions could have made a major contribution in this respect. Switzerland therefore regrets that it was not possible to reach agreement in Geneva last July. The challenge now is to ensure that progress made is not jeopardised and that confidence among WTO member states is restored, so that the world trade round can be brought to a successful conclusion.

Mr President,

Climate change is another major concern for the entire world population. We in Switzerland are particularly aware of this because our glaciers are rapidly melting away. In other parts of the world, this phenomenon takes the form of rising sea levels, changing precipitation patterns, droughts and floods. The reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) clearly show that all these disasters have a point in common. They are the result of climate change and are caused by human beings, and particularly by the consumption of fossil fuels.

The time for never-ending talks has passed. Switzerland will achieve its reduction goals for 2012. For the years after 2012 we need a new, ambitious and internationally accepted climate regime. This should be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Switzerland has put forward a proposal for a global CO-2 tax which meets this criterion and would ensure the financing of the necessary adaptation measures. I would like to invite you to study this proposal in the framework of the ongoing climate discussions.

The efforts of the industrialised countries alone will not be enough to solve the problem of global warming. Each country will – according to its own capacities - have to contribute to the reduction of CO-2 emissions. In doing so we are united by a common concern: to assume our responsibility to future generations.

Mr President,

Many countries are still at war today. On top of this, in many armed conflicts respect for international humanitarian law has declined. This is why Switzerland calls again on all conflicting parties to comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law and to guarantee humanitarian organisations swift and unhindered access to the victims of conflicts.

Conflict prevention is one of the central tasks of the UN. Switzerland is particularly active on two levels. *First* we wish to pay closer attention to the connection between "Armed Violence and Development". Together with other partners we intend to present a resolution on this subject during this session of the General Assembly. *Second* we strongly advocate the strengthening of the UN Secretariat's mediation capacities. The mediation efforts in Kenya demonstrated that this form of conflict prevention can work.

This brings me to the subjects of "Responsibility to Protect" and "Prevention of Genocide". Switzerland welcomes the fact that these subjects have now been institutionally anchored more firmly within the UN. The "Responsibility to Protect" was approved in September 2005 in the framework of the UN World Summit. It is obvious that the operational implementation of this concept can only be realised progressively. Nevertheless, Switzerland will engage in efforts to ensure that the concept is not reduced to that of "humanitarian intervention" and thus being used to question the consensus achieved in 2005.

Justice is a requirement for lasting peace. Or in other words peace and impunity are incompatible in the long run. The arrest of Charles Taylor and Radovan Karadzic and their extradition to The Hague have once again confirmed the benefits of international criminal justice. Alleged war criminals must not be allowed to remain at large without being brought before a court. They must answer for their acts in a fair trial. This is the preventive effect of the international criminal justice system, an effect that should not be underestimated. This is why Switzerland particularly supports the work of the International Criminal Court and advocates its independence.

Mr President,

At the beginning of my speech, I stressed the great importance of the UN. But the world is changing. International relations are constantly developing. The UN will also have to change. Those who focus only on the past will miss the future.

There is a need for reform in all UN bodies, but particularly in the Security Council. Given the power that it exerts, the demands on the Security Council are rightly very high. If its decisions are to be supported by the entire international community, the Council will need to adapt to the realities of the twenty-first century, i.e. to the new balances that characterise our world at the political, economic and demographic levels. Moreover, it is important that the views of important actors which are not members of the Council should be better taken into account in decision-making. Switzerland has for some time advocated an improvement of working methods. It will continue to advocate greater participation and transparency.

Mr President,

Peace is not a given. It is something that has to be striven for and achieved every day. The UN is the predestined institution for achieving this goal. We are willing, within our capacities, to make a contribution to this necessary collective task.

Thank you.