

Free for publication on 24 September 2009 at 20 hrs 00 local time (25 September 2009 at 03 hrs 00 Finnish time)

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech by President of the Republic of Finland Tarja Halonen at the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 24 September 2009

Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the General Assembly. I assure you of our full support in your important function.

* * *

As many colleagues have already underlined, the international climate negotiations are at a crucial stage. The Copenhagen Summit is a real possibility for change. We need political determination and solidarity to reach a new climate agreement which is global, effective and fair. The responsibility lies with all of us - industrial countries and emerging economies alike - to take the decisions which will so profoundly shape the future of humankind.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for convening a Summit on Climate Change at the beginning of this year's General Assembly. We had a good discussion on issues that still need to be addressed before December. The meeting delivered a clear message that we are committed to work hard to seal the deal.

A global climate agreement is a precondition for comprehensive sustainable development. The poorest are the most vulnerable when struggling with the adverse effects of climate change. The new agreement must include elements of solidarity and international support in coping with the needs of adaptation.

Climate change will affect especially seriously the lives and livelihood of women, but they are also powerful actors in combating it. We need to ensure their full participation in the negotiations and in the implementation of the new agreement.

Gender, food production and climate change are all interlinked. We know that 70 percent of the world's poor are women and girls. We also know that the majority of agricultural labourers are women. If we really want to combat climate change and avoid a global food crisis, we need to pay close attention to the role of women, especially in the least developed countries.

While the negative consequences of climate change are universal, their impact on the Small Island Developing States and countries with low-lying coastal areas is particularly grave. These countries are threatened by the rise of the sea level and by extreme weather conditions. They need particular attention and assistance.

* * *

In September 2000, we committed ourselves to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and to reach the Millennium Development Goals. In the 2005, World Summit we reiterated the pledge. Now, in 2009, we have to demonstrate our resolution to live up to this commitment also when faced with a contracting world economy.

The solution of the current financial and economic crisis should be based on the concept of fair globalization. Our action, while striving at sustainable economic growth, must address the goal of decent work for all. It is essential that we keep our commitments to development in spite of our budget constraints.

In the world economy, the tectonic plates are in motion and new actors are emerging. We need to develop a new global consensus on business ethics, integrity and sustainable economic growth. We must work together so that trust in international financial institutions can be re-established. Let us make them more transparent, accountable and sustainable.

I sincerely hope that the G20 Pittsburgh Summit will agree on further measures for a global recovery. But we should make full use of the United Nations to promote inclusive and equitable cooperation on issues which are truly global.

* * *

While climate change and the global economic downturn causes problems in many parts of the world, Africa is the continent that suffers the most. The international community must remain attentive to Africa's needs.

But I am glad to note that also positive developments have taken place in Africa. During this decade, the number of conflicts in Africa has decreased. The African Union is committed to strengthening the organisation's capacity in conflict prevention. Finland is contributing to this important endeavour by supporting the build-up of the peace mediation structures of the African Union.

It would be great if we could concentrate solely on development issues, but our agenda must include finding solutions to current conflicts.

The latest developments in the Middle East Peace Process give reason to careful optimism. It seems that the parties are willing to take some steps. Countries outside the region are committed to supporting these efforts. It is my belief that with this broadening consensus we can activate the peace process soon.

* * *

Finland values highly the UN Charter and the central role given to the Security Council. We actively participate in the efforts to make this body more representative and efficient. Finland is a candidate to become a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2013-14. At the same time, we hope that progress on the Council's reform could be made already during this General Assembly.

Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security were important achievements. Their implementation in all countries and in all situations is urgently needed.

The International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership, Development, International Peace and Security, held last March in Monrovia, adopted a Call to Action on Resolution 1325, and a Call for Action on Gender and Climate Change. As a follow-up to the Colloquium, Finland and Liberia convened a side-event today here at the UN. The event, titled "Peace and Security through Women's Leadership: Acting on 1325 and Climate Change" focused on strengthening partnerships in implementing Resolution 1325 and integrating gender aspects in the new climate agreement.

Resolution 1820 strongly condemns sexual violence in conflicts. We must treat systematic rape as a forbidden weapon of war. Victims of rape and sexual abuse must have access to legal processes while the rapists are prosecuted and condemned.

Appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Women and Armed Conflict would in our view enhance the implementation of Resolutions 1325 and 1820. We hope that all member states will support this proposal. I want to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for bringing up the question of violence against women in his opening address at the General Assembly yesterday.

In conflict situations, the civilian population needs protection. At the UN World Summit in 2005, the "Responsibility to Protect" was accepted as a general principle applying to genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and war crimes. Further efforts are urgently needed to save civilians from the violence, and we welcome the active role of the Secretary-General in reminding us of this important commitment.

* * *

This morning, the Security Council had a debate on nuclear security issues. I am pleased that disarmament is strongly returning to the international agenda. I sincerely hope that this will lead to real progress.

We have to try to find things that unite us – and not things that divide us - if we want to be midwives of the future and not guardians of the past. Finally, I would like to underline that lasting peace can only be built through open dialogue between cultural and religious communities, in our countries and worldwide. Finland supports all the initiatives, such as the Alliance of Civilisations, in stimulating intercultural communication. I wish these efforts best success in promoting mutual understanding and peace and promise that Finland will continue to be engaged.