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“The Future of the United Nations”

Jean Ping

President of the 59th session of the United Nations General Assembly

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MICHAEL REISMAN: Thank you very much Secretary Orr for that very comprehensive and inspiring statement. It is my honor now to introduce his Excellency Mr. Jean Ping who is President of the 59th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

JEAN PING: Well thank you very much. I think that Mr. Orr said everything, so it's very easy for me now to speak. I hope that I won't repeat too much what he has said.

Mr. President, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to participate in this conference on the future of the United Nations. At the outset, allow me to thank and congratulate the Foreign Policy Association for the initiative of organizing this meeting on the daunting and historical challenge of adapting the United Nations to the realities of the 21st century.

The contribution of your association to the promotion of research and discussion for a better understanding of international affairs, in particular at a time of such rapid and unprecedented changes, is laudable.

As you know, today's international context differs from the one which was prevailing when the United Nations was founded in 1945. The UN's membership has grown from 51 to 191 member states. The Cold War has come to an end and we are living in a globalized and interdependent world.

As highlighted in the report of the Secretary General's High Level Panel, the world is now facing many more challenges and threats of much more complex

nature. There is a growing demand for accountability, welfare, more freedom and democracy within and among nations.

This is why reforming the United Nations whose value for the international community is unquestionable. Far from being a simple routine, exercise has become a vital necessity. Imagine that at the end of the year there is no reform, what will be the consequences for the public opinion, for member states, for those the hope has been raised now? What will be the opinion of member states and populations after all this criticism which has been made against the United Nations on rumor of corruption, on the scandal of UN troops in the Congo, etc? It will be a very big disappointment if we don't succeed in reforming the United Nations.

Today, there is indeed general agreement that the time is right to carry out an effective reform of the UN. We must respond efficiently to the many threats, to peace and collective security on the one hand, and to the pressing and legitimate expectation for development, liberty and human dignity on the other hand.

But the question is what kind of organization do we need in order to effectively tackle the challenges before us? For we have no other choice but to act collectively and without delay if we are to succeed.

The Secretary General's comprehensive report of the 21st of March, 2005, entitled, "A Larger Freedom Toward Development, Security and Human Rights for All," constitutes in this regard a timely and important contribution to our quest for answers.

The report presents us with a number of ideas and proposals on which member states will have to make important decisions. This report draws largely from the High Level Panel's and the Millennium Project reports, initiated by the Secretary General. Both reports were debated at length by the General Assembly in December, 2004, in January and February, 2005, respectively.

The discussions in the General Assembly reveal a great deal of reactions. They also showed that given the complexity and the sensitivity of the issues on the table, acting thereon will require both a shared sense of urgency and strong political will. Hence, at stake is the question that one can rightly ask, namely how to move from ideas contained in the Secretary Generals' report to an effective action for the reform of the UN.

These imply that ideas alone will not be sufficient to change the way we do business at the UN. In fact, action, collectively, and effective action is needed. In this exercise, how can the member states' often diverting interest be reconciled and set on the course of a coherent and efficient action?

In other words, what is to build up the political convergence required to perform a balanced and actionable reform? What is the appropriate methodology to reach this end?

Given the time constraint, I will just put forward some answers to these crucial questions and outline some of the steps already taken by the 59th session of the General Assembly.

As you are all aware, the high level plenary meeting to be held in New York in September, 2005, will coincide with the 60th anniversary of the United Nations. This is the time when world leaders will gather to solemnly adopt a series of decisions that will define the new role and architecture of the United Nations. Member states all agree that this will be a decisive occasion.

In this context that we have been engaged in since the beginning of the 59th session last September, in a continuous, active, open, transparent, and inclusive consultation process, this process is two fold. First, it aims at adapting the modalities for the organization of high level plenary meeting in September and secondly, its purpose is to ensure a framework for total consultations on the substantive issues before the member states.

As I pointed out before, the Secretary General's report served as a basis for the consultations of the General Assembly. From the sixth to the eighth of April, we completed general consultations. Member states actively participated and extensively commented on the report.

If in general delegations welcomed the Secretary General's report, several delegations found however that this report was not sufficiently balanced, and does not reflect accurately the views expressed by many member states during the December to February debates.

This is the opinion of some member states, it's not the general opinion. Some other member states think that the report was, they welcomed the report. Some delegations stressed also that in the process of preparing for the September, 2005 high level plenary meeting, we must avoid talking at the action, remain pragmatic and enable member states to build agreement on what it is possible to achieve, constantly bearing in mind that reform is a process and not an end in itself.

Following those general consultations, we will hold from 19th to 28th April, a series of informal thematic consultations on the four main themes of the Secretary General's proposals. Freedom to live in dignity, freedom from fear, freedom from want and strengthening the United Nations.

To conduct these debates, I will be assisted by a group of 10 citizen diplomats who will serve as facilitators. The majority of them are here in this room. I see anyways, some of them.

Of course, we will have to make full use of the very limited time before us, since there is no room for any formal prep mechanism. Let me also stress that our work here in New York will not take place in isolation. For our efforts to be productive, we will need the active involvement of the respective capitals and public opinion at large so that we make concerted and coherent progress.

In this regard, I welcome the decision taken by the Secretary General to appoint five special envoys. My facilitators and I look forward to working closely with them.

To summarize, I wish to emphasize the following three points. First, we need to share a sense of urgency and responsibility to act. Second, we need to engage in a spirit of cooperation and constructive dialog. Third, we should focus on the many challenges and threats facing humanity and decide on the most effective set of measures to tackle them.

We are now in a turning point, member states are the stones of the new house we want to build for the present and the future of humanity. They should not become the stumbling blocks of the reform on the United Nations.

For beyond adapting the United Nations to the 21st century, what is really at stake here is the lives of millions of people across the world. I hope that the outcomes of this FPA conference will make a valuable contribution to the discussions ahead.

I thank you.

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