

United Nations

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THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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between rich and poor nations, in many cases compounded by globalisation and trade liberalization, is marginalizing many countries, particularly in the developing world. Poverty worldwide - the burden of which falls unequally on our most vulnerable groups - children, women, the elderly and the disabled - harbour the seeds of instability, hatred and conflict. At the same time, there has been a marked drop in official development assistance from richer to poorer countries.

We could not have known in 1945 that as we work to improve public health and eradicate disease, new and deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS would emerge to threaten societies and nations. Yet this disease, in particular, continues to wreak havoc among the most productive sectors of the population, and especially our youth, and to negatively impact the economies of many countries, particularly in the developing world. We also could not have anticipated how difficult it would be to erase age-old attitudes like racial discrimination and religious intolerance. Nor could we foresee the extreme contemporary forms these now take.

At San Francisco, we could not have foreseen the "internationalization" of major perils we face today - the illicit traffic in drugs and small arms and light weapons, the organized criminal networks that control these nefarious trades and other transnational crime, and the ever present threat of terrorism - to name a few. National borders, even those of the most powerful, cannot protect nations against these perils. Even international credentials and a mandate to act on behalf of the international community is no longer a safeguard. For last August in Baghdad, the United Nations itself became a terrorist target.

Today, conflict and war contin





Above all, as you negotiate and take decisions, you must ask yourself whether your decisions can be effectively implemented, to meet your goals and objectives. If they cannot, your work may well have been an exercise in futility.

There are a few final thoughts I would like to leave with you. The first concerns the "fundamental democracy" of the United Nations General Assembly, and what it takes to be a truly effective delegation. It is often not the powerful countries that marshal the most interesting and innovative ideas through the United Nations. It was Costa Rica that was responsible for driving the idea of a High Commissioner for Human Rights through the General Assembly. The concept of the Law of the Sea and the possibility of mining the deep seabed for the benefit of all mankind was driven by the small island state of Malta. And Trinidad and Tobago, supported by the countries of the Caribbean Community, was the driving force behind the most recent initiative that led to the establishment of an International Criminal Court. In short, a good new idea, persuasively presented and patiently negotiated, can become part of the world's agenda even if it comes from a very small State.

The second thought I wish to leave with you concerns the General Assembly, the only representative organ of the United Nations. As such, agreement would ultimately have to be forged within the General Assembly on much of the issues on the international agenda. For it is the Assembly alone that contains the world as it is, that reflects both the world's problems and possibilities. Importantly, it is in the Assembly that reform of the United Nations, whether General Assembly or Security Council, would be negotiated and endorsed.

Yes, questions concerning the "relevance" of the United Nations have focused on the General Assembly, at a time when great powers are asserting their right to act unilaterally, and to deal with the United Nations through more limited membership bodies. But I must tell you that, in the months that I have been privileged to serve as President, I have been constantly impressed by the General Assembly and its Member States - their determination to find ways through obstacles; their willingness to negotiate; their readiness to examine new ideas, and above all by their conviction that this uniquely universal organization, the United Nations, must be enabled to survive and to do the great work for which it was designed.

I hope that your deliberations will bring each of you new insights into the work of the United Nations, and importantly on where the organization stands in this period of challenge and change. Whether your future takes you into academia, the professions, business or government, I believe