

Mr President of the General Assembly,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Mr Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address, on behalf of Switzerland, the General Assembly which this year is presided over by my compatriot, Joseph Deiss. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate President Deiss on his election. His election is a great honour for Switzerland: It is not only a recognition of President Deiss and his accomplishments but also of our country's commitment to the United Nations and to multilateralism.

1. Rebuilding the UN

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We find ourselves today in a building that is undergoing renovation. The architectural makeover of the UN prompts me to ask: "What kind of UN are we building for the next 10, 20 or 30 years?" Without doubt, we need a UN that is able to meet the challenges ahead for the good of all humanity. We need a UN that can make an effective contribution to solving the world's problems. And we need UN Member States that are ready to take full responsibility for building a better world.

2. The world of tomorrow?

The future of the UN must reflect the world of tomorrow. Still nearly one billion people are malnourished. There will be many more people living on this planet, and no doubt we shall have to do with fewer resources. Thanks to new developments in technology and information our citizens will participate more directly in the challenges facing our societies. They will be better informed and they will feel that at least some of the legitimacy of this universal organisation depends on its ability to respond effectively to these challenges. And our citizens will demand that the UN be accountable to them.

3. Vision of a stronger UN

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In an increasingly globalised world we must treasure and defend the principles contained in the United Nations Charter. We must take care to ensure the proper functioning of this structure we have built together in a spirit of solidarity, respect and responsibility.

A strong international community requires solidarity. This means more than providing assistance to countries when they are unable to help their own citizens. It also means reminding States of the responsibilities they have towards their own people in terms of security, the rule of law, human rights and democracy – in respect for the Charter of the United Nations.

Every woman and every man - every citizen - must make his and her contribution to the structure we are building together. And at the same time, every Member State must be able to place its national interests second to the common good. This is the only way that it will be possible to find solutions that are acceptable to all.

4. International cooperation, representation and governance

Every day, we are reminded of the ever-growing magnitude and complexity of the global challenges confronting us: the economic and financial crisis, climate change, energy and food security, development and poverty, peace and security.

The search for sustainable solutions to these challenges calls for real governance, governance moreover that must reflect the new realities in the world. The new-found prosperity of some must go hand in hand with new responsibilities. States whose economic success enables them to play a more active role in the governance of the world must accept the new responsibilities that go with this active role.

The United Nations enjoys a unique legitimacy due to its universal membership. This legitimacy also derives from the issues it addresses - issues that concern us all, of which this week's agenda is the best possible proof.

But the legitimacy of the UN also depends on its performance and its ability to respond to the expectations placed on it. At times it seems ill-equipped and hesitant in its actions. The power conferred by universality becomes a burden when we, Members, are divided. Our debates should not be limited to the lowest common denominator. They must lead to action and to results in the interest of the common good of humanity.

If the UN fails to act, other groups representing only some of the countries of the world will step in, in an effort to take effective action and play a central role in global governance. As far as Switzerland is concerned, such groups lack legitimacy by virtue of their limited composition. It is crucial therefore for the UN and its principal organs to remain at the centre of world governance. That is why we must take care to ensure that the legitimacy of this universal body does not suffer from a lack of efficiency. To be able to make progress in building a better world, it is our collective responsibility to meet global challenges with a global response. Switzerland wants to contribute to this joint effort.

5. Areas for action

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Concerted global action is required in the following areas:

- The Millennium Development Goals must be implemented rapidly and fully.
- We know that dropping sacks of rice from helicopters is not enough. We must help people to grow it. Still today, 1.4 billion people around the world are living in extreme poverty. Every day, too many women and children are dying of malnutrition and lack of care. We know that huge financial sums are needed when disaster strikes. Money flows to emergency situations, but who is still concerned three years later? Who is involved in the reconstruction?
- Binding objectives must be defined as quickly as possible for reducing CO₂ emissions. Nowadays, we have knowledge and we have clean and green technology. We must act, every nation with targeted measures for itself. Simply waiting for the industrialised countries to invest in the South will not lead anywhere. Here too, everyone must take their own responsibilities. This year in Mexico we still have an opportunity to make progress. The most recent natural disasters are clear warnings. Switzerland will reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases by 20% by the year 2020.

- Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains a grave threat to peace and security. But the gravest harm among civilian populations is caused by small arms and light weapons.
- Terrorists are able to benefit from this situation by easily supplying themselves in the arms market. For this reason, Switzerland, together with other countries, is supporting the full implementation of the global anti-terrorist strategy of the United Nations. This initiative provides for the involvement of specialists from the fields of humanitarian aid and education.
- Gender equality must at last become a reality. Access to education and health for women and girls has been restricted for decades. They have been victims of poverty more than others. They have also been the targets of systematic violence in armed conflicts. It is high time to make full use of their potential in mediation and reconstruction in countries affected by conflict. In this context, Switzerland welcomes the creation of “UN Women”, which brings us closer to the fulfilment of this vision.

Conclusion

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, we must avoid making the United Nations an immutable “historic monument” but rather turn it into a dynamic organisation. The UN is the only organisation in the world with the legitimacy to represent all nations and all peoples. It is the only legitimate organisation in the world capable of narrowing differences and restoring a balance between regions. To be able to do this, however, every Member State must accept its responsibilities and start with the task of putting its own house in order. Discussion and preparing reports are not enough however. We need to act. Each UN Member State must commit itself clearly within the Organisation to respond to the urgent questions facing the world today and tomorrow. Such commitments will strengthen confidence in the United Nations and its credibility. Switzerland remains firmly convinced of the appropriateness of a multilateral approach, with the United Nations at its centre. Together with the contributions of you all we will be able to create a more just, peaceful and prosperous world. I thank you for your commitment.