



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Bakir IZETBEGOVIĆ

Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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- PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Es-Selamu Aleikum and Good Morning!

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election and thank Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for successfully presiding over the previous session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for visiting my country this July. As we are marking the twentieth anniversary of our admission to the United Nations, his visit came as recognition that Bosnia and Herzegovina has travelled a long way since joining this Organization, having transformed itself from a recipient of security assistance into a contributor to global peace and security.

I also want to commend the Secretary General for his tireless efforts to advance dialogue and cooperation, and his firm commitment to the core values and principles of the United Nations. We in Bosnia and Herzegovina recognize the importance of, and we fully support his action agenda that identified five generational imperatives: prevention, a more secure world, helping countries in transition, empowering women and youth, and sustainable development.

Mr. President,

Today's world is a scene of unfolding crises and mounting global challenges. The first and foremost of these is the disaster in Syria.

As we stand here, our fellow Syrians are fighting against a brutal regime. They are fighting to take their destiny into their own hands. The regime of Bashar al-Assad is answering their yearning for freedom and democracy with guns and bombs, just like his father's regime did thirty years ago. This is revolting and morally reprehensible. But so is our collective failure to stop it.

Once again, we are idly standing by while a human tragedy of dramatic proportions is unfolding before our eyes. We should do our part to help the Syrian people's historic stand for freedom. We should do our part to save the people of Syria from tyranny. We should. But we are not.

The images coming from Syria remind us of the tragedy of Bosnia. We in Bosnia and Herzegovina feel the pain of the Syrian people as our own because we went through the same horrors not that long ago.

When the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited Srebrenica with me this July to pay respects to the genocide victims, he said:

"The international community must be united not to see any further bloodshed in Syria because I do not want to see any of my successors, after 20 years, visiting Syria, apologizing for what we could have done to protect the civilians in Syria – which we are not doing now".

His predecessor, Kofi Annan, stated in the report on the fall of Srebrenica:

“Through error, misjudgment and an inability to recognize the scope of the evil confronting us, we failed to do our part to help save the people of Srebrenica....The tragedy of Srebrenica will haunt our history forever....”

Today, these words ring true about this Organization’s failure to respond to the tragedy in Syria.

The best way to honor the victims of the Srebrenica genocide would have been to learn the lessons of that failure and not to commit the same errors ever again. Sadly, the United Nations, especially its Security Council, have failed to do so.

The international community has chosen, yet again, to repeat the trial-and-error pattern of policies that failed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The resolutions, statements of concern, ineffective sanctions, observers, and no mandate to protect civilians are actions that have deadly consequences demonstrated in my country.

Make no mistake. Unless we act now and act decisively to help the people of Syria and put an end to their bloodshed, this tragedy will haunt our history forever, just like Srebrenica.

Mr. President,

The developments at the beginning of the twenty-first century defy rational prediction.

Indeed, who could have predicted such an explosion of freedom in the Middle East?

In the last few years, we have been witnessing a historic awakening in the Arab world. Underway now are profound social and political changes, aimed at creating democratic societies.

These changes have been fermenting for decades. They are the best confirmation that Muslims strongly strive for freedom, dignity, and human rights.

A well-educated, free-thinking generation of young Arabs has finally broken the chains of dictatorship. No force can prevent this new generation from taking charge of their destiny.

As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly supported the Arab peoples’ aspirations for greater freedom and democracy. We acted to ensure that the international community supported those who wanted free societies instead of closed ones, rule of law instead of rule of one person, democracy instead of dictatorship, justice and fairness instead of oppression and corruption.

Mr. President,

The stalemate in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deeply troubling. The peace process is not moving forward. The chain of violence has not broken.

A new impetus to negotiations is urgently needed because there is no alternative to a negotiated solution.

The Palestinians have every right – historic, moral, and legal – to a state of their own. Israel has every right to its security. The occupation must end. But so must the terror and violence.

All attempts to create new realities on the ground in the hope those will become accepted as a starting point of future negotiations must be rejected. The continuation of settlement activities on occupied Palestinian territories continues to pose the most serious obstacle to peace. Israel should immediately end all settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories because these activities are illegal under international law. Doing so is in Israel's own best interest if it truly desires peace with the Palestinians.

The state of affairs of sixty or six thousand years ago is not the right point of reference. The right reference point for a solution is the principle of peaceful coexistence of two sovereign states – an independent Palestine and a secure Israel. That is the only realistic way to bring about a just resolution to the conflict and ensure stability and progress in the Middle East.

To achieve such a solution, a more sincere attempt at good-faith negotiations is needed, especially by Israel. The road to peace does not go by way of ignoring the United Nations resolutions, by squeezing the Palestinians to the leftovers of the land that once belonged to their fathers, and by building settlements on those leftovers.

This Organization must send a strong message that its resolutions have to be respected – that there are no double standards or chosen peoples when it comes to the application of the international legal norms and human rights principles.

Mr. President,

In the past weeks we have witnessed disturbing violence linked to intolerance. The video that sparked these developments is deeply insulting. It deserves the strongest condemnation, and we absolutely reject its content and message.

There is, however, no justification for responding to this movie with violence. Violence in response to speech is unacceptable. There can be no debate about that. Violence is no way to honor religion. Responding to bigotry with violence only fans the flames of intolerance further.

We must draw the line at violence. But we also must find a way to prevent hate speech and bigotry. Yes, there is the right to free speech. But there is also the right to dignity.

We cannot impose our ideology or our religion on anyone else. We must promote tolerance. But we must also promote mutual respect. That is why, as responsible leaders, we should have a frank debate about the outer limits of free expression when that freedom is abused to incite hate and deliberately slander the dignity of others.

Mr. President,

There is no inherent contradiction between Islamic and Western values. To the contrary, these values are compatible. After all, they derive from the same sources. Throughout history, interactions between these values have led to tremendous achievements.

There is no clash. There are only those who need to create a false perception of clash in order to come to power or maintain their hold on power.

So many societies in today's world are in transition, yearning to find a balance between traditional and modern values. The relation between the West and the Islamic world and between their respective value systems is going to be one of the most critical issues of our time. That relation will pass through crises and periods of misunderstanding and intolerance. In this modern age, we have to keep searching for a formula, a model for how to reconcile the relations between Islamic and Western values, between the East and West. No matter how hard it may be, finding that formula is going to be essential in the time ahead of us.

The human condition is one of diversity. Our human race is a mosaic composed of a rich variety of peoples, cultures and religions that shine together in a dynamic, sparkling pattern. Our responsibility is to nurture and protect that mosaic.

I come from a country whose historical experience can offer valuable lessons in finding a model for peaceful co-existence of such diversity. The whole world can benefit from the lessons my country has learned from constantly seeking to improve its understanding and management of diversity.

For hundreds of years, its citizens lived in harmony, helping each other to build houses of worship that almost physically lean on one another. The westernmost range of Orthodox Christianity and Islam, the easternmost range of Catholicism, Bosnia is a meeting point of civilizations, a bridge between the East and the West. Its unique multiethnic culture has been woven through one thousand years of tolerance and respect among its citizens, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation. That is why its preservation and success, as a specific microcosm, is crucial for the whole world.

But due to our recent past, a great struggle is now underway in my country between the idea of co-existence and the idea of division. I believe the outcome of this struggle will have a significant bearing on resolving one of the greatest challenges of our time -- that of conflict versus cooperation. If the idea of co-existence and cooperation does not prevail in Bosnia, it can hardly prevail anywhere else in this world of ours. If the unique social fabric of my country, that was torn by crimes and force, is not renewed, that will be a defeat for the very idea of co-existence. It will be a defeat that will produce a widening gap at one of the most delicate fault lines of our world.

Mr. President,

The growing power of humankind brings progress and prosperity. Yet, the selfish side of that power cuts into the very substance on which our future depends - our physical habitat and our spiritual essence.

The world we live in is changing at a speed and in a direction that is rightfully worrisome. Inequality, injustice, and intolerance are rising. There is more conflict and less cooperation. There is ever more violence and ever less compassion, solidarity, mutual care, healthy interpersonal relations and family life. People around the world take to the streets in a dramatic warning that there is ever less fairness in the societies in which they live. These unsettling trends can be reversed only by a decisive and coordinated global action. The future

we desire will not be a utopia if we join our forces in finding the right solutions. Cooperative approaches are difficult to accomplish but are needed more than ever.

We are not perfect, but we can be better. We can be wiser, more responsible, more willing to learn from our past mistakes. Too often we have been prisoner of our own mentality. We perceive willingness to compromise as a weakness. But just the opposite is true – compromise requires courage.

To build a future, we must make compromises. To succeed, we must stop indulging in manipulative kinds of populism. We must break out of the worn and frayed patterns of the past. We must turn to the future. Instead of having endless debates about what has been, we must devote ourselves to reaching agreements about what can be.

We must correctly interpret the interests of those we represent. We must listen to the views of others, no matter how different those views may be. We must understand each other better and respect each other more.

Mr. President,

Our most important mission in the time to come will be to build bridges between cultures, religions, and civilizations; bridges of trust, understanding, and respect; bridges to reach problems the true nature of which we have only begun to understand. That is hard work that requires daring leadership.

This Organization has gone through difficult trials. But it has always been the best framework for building those bridges. Let us keep it that way going forward.

Thank you very much.