



ITALY

**STATEMENT BY
THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY**

**PROFESSOR
ROMANO PRODI**

**TO THE 62nd GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

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Mr President,

I wish to offer you my heartfelt congratulations on your election to preside over this 62nd session of the General Assembly. Your experience in international affairs and your first-hand knowledge of the Organisation make you particularly suitable for this important post. At the same time I sincerely thank your predecessor, President Al Khalifa, for her wise and dedicated leadership of this Assembly.

I wish to begin where I left off last year: our decision to defend human rights in the world and to oppose the death penalty.

In recent months Italy has worked very hard to enable the Assembly to adopt a resolution for a universal moratorium on the death penalty, with a view to its complete abolition. It has been a source of great satisfaction to see support for our initiative growing day-by-day in Europe and in every region of the world. We have now reached a decisive moment.

I trust that we shall all be united in this battle, which is supported by Nobel Laureates, statesmen and women, and free men and women from throughout the world, and that the “growing trend in international law and national practice toward a phasing out of the death penalty”—to quote Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon—will be officially sanctioned by this General Assembly’s adoption of the draft resolution we are about to deposit, together with many countries from every regional group and from the European Union.

If genuine politics means showing foresight, we shall perform a great political act through the adoption of this resolution. It will demonstrate that humankind is of making progress not only in science but also in the field of ethics.

A United Nations resolution against the death penalty will prove that human beings today are better than they were yesterday also in moral terms. An outcome with enormous consequences, heralding a more just future, and a society that has at last freed itself from the spiral of revenge, demonstrating that it has heeded the warning of the ancients: “if you want peace, you must work for justice.”

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Last year we welcomed the ceasefire in Lebanon and the launch of the new UNIFIL mission, which has been under Italian command for several months now. Today, thanks in part to our common commitment, Lebanon is in a better situation, although it has not yet solved its problems, as the brutal attacks of recent days have unfortunately demonstrated.

We must continue to support the Lebanese reconciliation process, and help the country to regain its unity through the election of a new President. We must do this without ignoring the root causes of the conflicts afflicting the Middle East, first and foremost the Palestinian question. In short we must continue to mobilize support for the reconciliation of different peoples and of the same people.

Restoring peace to the Middle East is the top priority of the international community. Because if one day this region finds greater peace, freedom and prosperity, we shall all live in greater peace, freedom and prosperity.

I am therefore delighted that the United States has promoted a new international meeting on the peace process. We are ready to provide our input, and we are already working on it, knowing that the more countries in the region that are behind it, the greater the possibility of success.

Italy will continue to play its part in the rest of the region, too. Starting with dialogue. For it is through dialogue that the most difficult issues can be resolved. I have never seen a lasting solution to a problem when the solution is imposed from above or from outside.

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Today's challenges are complex, such as bringing peace to the Middle East. If we wish to govern them we must be equal to their dimensions. In other words we have to set aside all partisan interests in a world that is increasingly shaped by global processes. This also applies to climate change, to which this session is most appropriately dedicated.

As I said yesterday at the panel convened by the United Nations Secretary-General, Italy considers climate change a priority issue. We are among the European supporters of a unilateral 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. We have made similar commitments on energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and biofuels.

In Europe we have already made various strategic decisions. But it is obvious that any post-Kyoto agreement can only be achieved within the United Nations. Because when we speak about global warming we are speaking about the pre-eminent global problem of our day.

Mr President,

National approaches to solving the world's problems no longer exist. The era of making and unmaking national borders is long over. It is only through multilateralism, by marshalling everyone's energies, that we can hope to do good.

Our task today is to adapt for a changing world the multilateral structures at our disposal. To think of new forms of global governance. For there is no other way to manage global processes.

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The challenge facing Europe today is not to become resigned to the world as it is, but to seek to improve it based on the values in which Europe believes: freedom, democracy, respect for others and for the rules of peaceful coexistence. This is why we are adapting our founding treaties. This is why we are building a common foreign and defence policy. This is why we have invented a new citizenship - European citizenship – to which we are entitled by choosing to share certain values, not by virtue of kinship or nationality.

The European dream is thus the child of the universal dream of the United Nations.

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In the past year the United Nations has continued to play a central role in resolving international disputes. The cases of Lebanon and Darfur demonstrate that if the Member States are willing to give the United Nations a strong central role, the Organisation is up to the task.

So the question we have to ask ourselves is what the United Nations needs to fulfil its worldwide mission of being equally effective in different crisis areas.

What we need first and foremost is an Organisation capable of renewal and adaptation. In the past two years the revival of the reform process has produced its first positive results.

One essential aspect of the reform is the General Assembly, which remains the main decision-making organ of the Organisation. I never tire of repeating that we have to restore the General Assembly's central position, and to exploit its political guidance potential and above all its universality.

The principles of democracy and the representation of every Member State underpin the United Nations system. This is why we are opposed to any hypothesis of Security Council reform that would establish new permanent members. The growing contribution of a growing number of Countries to the Organisation should not be wasted by introducing élitist and selective reforms.

Reforming the Security Council means addressing one of the fundamental pillars of the global security architecture: the Council's central role and its characteristic as the paramount source of international legitimacy impel us to seek shared political solutions.

Last year, in this very room, I advocated that negotiations be started to break the deadlock and help strengthen the Organisation. I spoke of the need to start a negotiation that was based not on imposing predefined models and positions, but on the search for non-divisive solutions that would foster the widest possible consensus.

I am therefore delighted that one year on the General Assembly has decided to make every effort, also through intergovernmental negotiations, to reach a “general agreement” on the Security Council reform in which we all hope, and to open up a new chapter in view of an agreed solution—a solution that I hope will include strengthening the presence of the leading regional stakeholders in the Security Council.

Rest assured, Mr President, that Italy is ready and will not fail to demonstrate commitment and to contribute ideas in this new phase of the Security Council reform process.

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Reform is also intended to make the organisation more effective in the areas and on the issues where, by history and vocation, it can provide greater added value: Africa and development issues.

The United Nations is deeply engaged in Africa. Over two-thirds of the blue helmets are deployed in Africa on peacekeeping missions. Italy will pursue this goal through the establishment of the Peace Facility Fund for Africa, which will complement its European counterpart fund. Darfur and Somalia remain two of our central concerns.

But it would be mistaken to look only at the negative side and forget the many encouraging signs of development and unity coming from Africa.

In Europe we are now preparing the second Europe-Africa Summit. I hope that it will be held successfully before the end of the year. Italy is working above all to ensure that the Summit will spark a European policy for Africa that is worthy of the name.

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This brings me to development. It is the responsibility of the United Nations to keep development at the top of the international agenda. It will take more than lip service to the “Millennium Development Goals” to achieve them. We all have to work for their attainment. I have already expressed my willingness to sit around a table next year for a progress report on the implementation of the commitments we made seven years ago.

We can no longer ignore the reality around us: one-half of world trade and investment benefits 14% of the world's population; the 49 poorest countries in the world receive 0.5% of the global product; and 90% of the planet's wealth lies in the hands of only 1% of its inhabitants.

It will take the effort of everyone, particularly those who have more to give. The G8 can play an important role here. I pledge to make this issue the centrepiece of the Italian Presidency in 2009.

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Mr President,

The principles of solidarity and cooperation underlying this Organisation are as sound today as they were 62 years ago. The spread of democratic values and the greater attention to the protection of human rights should not make us forget that these principles and values are still threatened and violated in far too many parts of the world.

What's more, insecurity leads more and more people and countries to close themselves off.

The danger is that this sense of insecurity can cause societies to regress. Even the most free and democratic nations, feeling under threat, may adopt measures that will undermine peace, and with it the civil and political rights of their citizens.

In the face of such risks, the principles and values of the United Nations are our beacons and our stars. They make it possible for us to navigate even by night and in rough waters. Staying on course is not just a political imperative. It is above all a moral imperative.