

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
IN ADDRESS TO THE MILLENNIUM SUMMIT
OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL
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Madam President, Mr. Secretary General, my fellow leaders, let me begin by saying it is a great honor to have this unprecedented gathering of world leaders in the United States.

We come together not just at a remarkable moment on the calendar, but at the dawn of a new era in human affairs, when globalization and the revolution in information technology have brought us closer together than ever before. To an extent unimaginable just a few years ago, we reach across geographical and cultural divides. We know what is going on in each other's countries. We share experiences, triumphs, tragedies, aspirations.

Our growing interdependence includes the opportunity to explore and reap the benefits of the far frontiers of science and the increasingly interconnected economy. And as the Secretary General just reminded us, it also includes shared responsibilities to free humanity from poverty, disease, environmental destruction and war. That responsibility, in turn, requires us to make sure the United Nations is up for the job.

Fifty-five years ago, the U.N. was formed to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Today there are more people in this room with the power to achieve that goal than have ever been gathered in one place. We find today fewer wars between nations, but more wars within them. Such internal conflicts, often driven by ethnic and religious differences, took five million lives in the last decade, most of them completely innocent victims.

These conflicts present us with a stark challenge -- are they part of the scourge the U.N. was established to prevent? If so, we must respect sovereignty and territorial integrity, but still find a way to protect people as well as borders.

The last century taught us that there are times when the international community must take a side, not merely stand between the sides or on the sidelines. We faced such a test and met it when Mr. Milosevic tried to close the last century with

the final chapter of ethnic cleansing and slaughter. We have faced such a test for 10 years in Iraq, where the U.N. has approved a fair blueprint spelling out what must be done. It is consistent with our resolutions and our values, and it must be enforced.

We face another test today in Burma, where a brave and popular leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, once again has been confined -- with her supporters in prisons and her country in distress -- in defiance of repeated U.N. resolutions.

But most conflicts and disputes are not so clear-cut. Legitimate grievances and aspirations pile high on both sides. Here there is no alternative to principled compromise, in giving up old grudges in order to get on life. Right now, from the Middle East to Burundi to the Congo to South Asia, leaders are facing this kind of choice, between confrontation and compromise.

Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barak are with us here today. They have promised to resolve the final differences between them this year, finally completing the Oslo process embodied in the Declaration of Principles signed seven years ago this month at the White House.

To those who have supported the right of Israel to live in security and peace; to those who have championed the Palestinian cause these many years: let me say to all of you, they need your support now, more than ever, to take the hard risks for peace. They have the chance to do it. But like all life's chances, it is fleeting and about to pass. There is not a moment to lose.

When leaders do seize this chance for peace, we must help them. Increasingly, the United Nations has been called into situations where brave people seek reconciliation, but where the enemies of peace seek to undermine it. In East Timor, had the United Nations not engaged, the people would have lost the chance to control their future.

Today I was deeply saddened to learn of the brutal murder of the three U.N. relief workers there by the militia in West Timor, and I urge the Indonesian authorities to put a stop to these abuses.

In Sierra Leone, had the United Nations not engaged, countless children now living would be dead. But in both cases, the U.N. did not have the tools to finish the job. We must provide those tools -- with peacekeepers that can be rapidly deployed with the right training and equipment, missions well-defined and well-led, with the necessary civilian police.

And we must work, as well, to prevent conflict; to get more children in school; to relieve more debt in developing countries; to do more to fight malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS, which cause a quarter of all the deaths in the world; to do more to provoke prevention and to stimulate the development and affordable access to drugs and vaccines; to do more to curb the trade in items which generate money that make conflict more profitable than peace -- whether diamonds in Africa or drugs in Colombia.

All these things come with a price tag. And all nations, including the United States, must pay it. These prices must be fairly apportioned, and the U.N. structure of finances must be fairly reformed so the organization can do its job. But those in my country or elsewhere who believe we can do without the U.N., or impose our will upon it, misread history and misunderstand the future.

Let me say to all of you, this is the last opportunity I will have as President to address this General Assembly. It is the most August gathering we have ever had, because so many of you have come from so far away. If I have learned anything in these last eight years, it is, whether we like it or not, we are growing more interdependent. We must look for more solutions in which all sides can claim a measure of victory and move away from choices in which someone is required to accept complete defeat. That will require us to develop greater sensitivity to our diverse political, cultural and religious claims. But it will require us to develop even greater respect for our common humanity.

The leaders here assembled can rewrite human history in the new millennium. If we have learned the lessons of the past, we can leave a very different legacy for our children. But we must believe the simple things -- that everywhere in every land, people in every station matter. Everyone counts, everyone has a role to play, and we all do better when we help each other.

Thank you, and God bless you all.