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Fifty-fourth Session

8th Plenary meeting

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Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

**Address by Mr. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé,
President of the Republic of Honduras**

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Honduras.

Mr. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé, President of the Republic of Honduras, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Honduras, His Excellency Mr. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Facussé (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to express my pleasure at your recent election, Mr. President. I also wish to acknowledge the work of your illustrious predecessor, Mr. Didier Operti. The Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, also deserves acknowledgement for his untiring efforts to ensure that peace and security govern international relations in this turbulent world in which we live, always showing sensitivity and a very special concern for those who suffer the most, have the least, and therefore need the greatest care.

Almost a year ago, Central America was tragically struck by one of the most terrible hurricanes of the century. Our country, Honduras, was the most severely damaged,

with billions of dollars in losses resulting from the destruction of more than 70 per cent of its infrastructure and economy. More than 15,000 people were killed, injured or went missing and more than 1.5 million suffered losses, either directly or indirectly, a high percentage of whom lost their homes, belongings and businesses in their entirety.

Those unfortunate circumstances through which we had to live, the consequences of which we have only just begun to recover from, have been aggravated in recent weeks by the severity of the winter and high levels of precipitation. Once again, the banks of our country's main rivers have overflowed, as it was not possible to dredge them because of lack of time and resources. This is again jeopardizing the safety of numerous population centres and cities, causing more flooding and mudslides and blocking the country's main transportation arteries. This has brought further insecurity and anguish to our population, adding new losses and difficulties to the already grave state of affairs we have faced since last October.

Hurricane Mitch and other natural phenomena of uncommon violence lay bare the physical vulnerability of our countries and highlight the absolute necessity of early and organized preventive measures. Such preventive measures can be achieved at the national, regional, continental and, indeed, global levels only through combined, joint efforts and resources. No country, much less a country that is poor in material resources, is up to the task of bearing the massive destructive power of these

China in the world, that Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory and that the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government representing the whole of China. China's territory and sovereignty are absolutely indivisible. The ultimate reunification of the motherland represents the common aspiration and firm resolve of all the Chinese people, including our compatriots on Taiwan. No force can hold us back in this great cause.

The Chinese Government will continue to adhere to its established policy for settling the question of Taiwan. We are firmly opposed to any efforts to create "independence for Taiwan", "two Chinas", or "one China, one Taiwan". All moves to divide the motherland are doomed to failure. China's great cause of national reunification can and will be accomplished.

A few days ago a powerful earthquake shook China's province of Taiwan. This earthquake caused heavy loss of life and property damage for our compatriots in Taiwan. We are extremely concerned about this catastrophe and express our sympathy to our compatriots on the island. We also express our condolences to the families of the victims of the earthquake. People on both sides of the strait are brothers and sisters in one big family. The disaster that hit Taiwan and the pains of our compatriots on the island are shared by the entire Chinese people. We will provide every possible support and assistance to alleviate the harm caused by the earthquake.

I take this opportunity to thank the President of the General Assembly and the international community as a whole for their sympathy, condolences and assistance.

The twenty-first century is dawning. The future of the world is bright, and the new century is bound to be a more splendid one than this. The Chinese people stand ready to work with the people of other countries for the establishment of a just and rational new international order, for peace and development in the new century, and for the overall progress of human society.

The President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, His Excellency Mr. Lamberto Dini.

Mr. Dini (Italy): I congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly; it is a sure guarantee of success for the fifty-fourth session. I also wish to thank your predecessor, Didier Opertti, the Foreign Minister of Uruguay, for his exemplary management of the Assembly's work during the past year.

On the many issues facing the General Assembly in the year to come, Italy shares and supports the statement made yesterday by the Foreign Minister of Finland speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The last few years of this century have disproved the notion that people and human freedoms take second place to State sovereignty. In Kosovo and East Timor a coalition of States resorted to the use of force, but not for self-seeking national interests, not to defend their borders, not to impose new hegemonies.

The end of the nuclear nightmare has coincided with a rampant proliferation of local conflicts, terrorist acts and traumatic economic and financial crises. Can the end of communism have given peace to former cold-war enemies and conflict to the rest of the world? The cold war brought a precarious, imperfect peace. Was that preferable to the tragic series of conflicts that have embroiled humanity over the past 10 years? The division of Europe helped neutralize tensions throughout the planet. Does this mean that nuclear weapons brought about a period of unprecedented stability, and — as some have suggested, paradoxically — that we should award the Nobel Peace Prize to the bomb? The breakdown of the former international order has created a plethora of new States. Does this mean that dividing the world in two was the only way to grant common citizenship to peoples and religious groups that have never learned the art of peaceful coexistence? The international community now takes military action to deal with tragedies that only a few years ago would have left us indifferent, and yet we are still influenced by military assessments, strategic interests, regional solidarity, public opinion and the magnitude of any human rights violations. How can we act according to more precise rules, based primarily on the duty of States to protect the rights of individuals?

The crises that have broken out in recent years have raised agonizing dilemmas and difficult questions that demand answers. It would be wrong to use the imperfections of the international system as an excuse for inaction. But it would also be wrong to ignore the new demands for certainty and the rule of law: the greatest challenge is how to relate authority to law and lay down codes of conduct and political discipline that reconcile power with legitimacy.

Allow me to articulate a set of principles that could guide our action in the new century. First, we should enhance crisis prevention rather than conflict suppression. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has rightly observed that

we must eradicate the cultural and economic causes of conflicts and that a culture of conflict prevention must prevail over the culture of conflict suppression. We know what these causes of conflict are: the huge gap between the living standards and incomes of different classes and nations; the exponential increase in mass migration from poor to rich countries; cultural difference and the conflicts and fanaticism it triggers; criminal acts for the sake of glorifying or even creating a nation. These are the four horsemen of the contemporary Apocalypse.

Secondly, we should use force only as a last resort. Arms should be used to stop criminal behaviour only when economic and political instruments are inapplicable or have failed. Ten years ago, these same instruments brought down totalitarian communism, which was a more formidable enemy than today's tyrants. In the Balkans and in East Timor, peacekeeping operations were launched to address serious, massive and systematic violations of human rights. The decisions to intervene were made after repeated demands that the culprits end a state of illegality; after an exhaustive and fruitless search for a diplomatic solution; and by a group of States rather than by a single Power.

We are living in an age of unfinished wars. In Iraq as in Serbia, authoritarian rulers have been seriously weakened, but they are still in power. How and how much can sanctions be used to replace or complement the use of force? Perhaps we need clearer international strategies and rules that pay heed to the most vulnerable members of society, to the political opposition and to the risk of strengthening despots through sanctions. Our focus should be more on incentives than on sanctions.

Thirdly, we need to define rules. No one knows the size or shape of the next challenge. But our response must be dictated by respect for universal principles rather than by a balance of power. We must beware of conjuring up the spectre of international law as the law of the strongest. We must beware of making some countries more equal than others. To do so would run counter to our best political and cultural traditions, in which the law is meant to protect the weak.

The Western world and the Euro-Atlantic institutions are no threat to anyone's integrity, prosperity and freedom. But we must perfect the instruments that uphold the international rule of law. We must spell out the duties of States. We must create a fully fledged corpus of case law on universal human rights. We must work out rules and procedures that will justify the erosion of sovereignty in the name of global responsibility. This is why every country

must make it a priority to ratify the international instruments for safeguarding human rights. I am thinking in particular of the International Criminal Court, which was instituted in Rome in June of last year. These instruments should be reflected in our national legislation and practice. Finally, we should encourage the involvement of our own institutions. It is in this spirit that we have invited the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, to address the Italian Parliament.

Until human rights are firmly institutionalized, doubts will remain over the relationship between legitimacy and effectiveness. The gradual construction of universal citizenship is a learning process to which we all should contribute. Otherwise we shall be racing towards fragmentation, seeking forms of independence that are not economically viable and that are vulnerable to others' desire for hegemony.

Fourthly, we must learn to appreciate the judgement of others. I would like to quote, in this respect, one of the founding fathers of American democracy, James Madison. He said:

“An attention to the judgement of other nations is important to every government for two reasons. The first one is that, independently of the merits of any particular plan or measure, it is desirable, on various accounts, that it should appear to other nations as the offspring of a wise and honourable policy. The second is that, in doubtful cases, particularly where the national councils may be warped by some strong passion or momentary interests, the presumed or known opinion of the impartial world may be the best guides that can be followed.”

Today's world has acquired a new sensitivity. It will no longer tolerate the oppression of the weak. This implies a rethinking of the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference that have governed the community of nations for over three centuries, beginning in Europe. But we must avoid double standards, applying one yardstick to friendly countries and another to those that are not. This is what makes the ultimate sanction of the United Nations so indispensable, since an international legal standard cannot — except in exceptional temporary situations — be the prerogative of any single group of States.

When we defend the rights of others, we cannot pretend that the lives of our own people are not also at risk. By the same token, it would be inconsistent not to place the same value on other human lives as we do on our own.

Every culture and tradition must be involved in the defence of liberties and freedom. We cannot ignore the regional dimension of human rights, whose inviolable universal character can be enriched by the varieties of historic experiences. But stalemates and the paralysis of intersecting vetoes must be avoided by anchoring even the strongest States to a system of rules and principles, balancing their power against the effectiveness and strength of the international institutions.

Fifthly, we should strengthen the institutions. The aftermath of the cold war has proved that large political and economic groupings can more easily guarantee ethnic coexistence, religious tolerance and economic advancement. This should be kept in mind whenever pressure builds to release the genie of self-determination from the bottle of State sovereignty.

Only the great institutions, whether regional — such as the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance — or universal — such as the United Nations — can close the gap between democratic codification of laws and their effective enforcement. Unless we have a strong institutional network, every peacekeeping operation could end up looking as if we were taking the law into our own hands. Everyone would feel as if he should look out only for his own security, leading to a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, let us resume the disarmament talks, as President Clinton proposed in his statement yesterday, and place our common security on more solid foundations.

There is one lesson to be learned from these years of turmoil: actions to prevent and repress the most serious violations of human rights may take precedence over respect for national sovereignty. No Government can hide behind the shield of its own borders. Legitimacy demands the redefinition of relations between States and the international community. It demands the reformulation of the principle of non-interference, which has sometimes allowed States to neglect their duties towards their citizens. Although the United Nations is an organization of States, the rights and the ideals it protects are those of individuals.

I have listed some rules that will help redefine coexistence among peoples through the work of the United Nations. We live in a world in which threats against one group immediately affect every other group and impel them

to take responsibility, a world in which the concept of non-interference can no longer be invoked to obstruct action in the face of serious violations of fundamental rights. We must ask ourselves how to address all these changes, for the sake of closer and more equitable international cooperation.

Of course, States will continue to have different perceptions of national interests, and there will be a continued need to reconcile them peacefully. But for the United Nations to meet the challenges of the new century, our codes of conduct must be placed within a more solid institutional framework. The United Nations Security Council should be made more representative and democratic in composition, in line with proposals of a number of Member States. All the citizens of the world should be able to identify themselves with the United Nations and feel a part of its decision-making and law-making processes; this for the sake of universal sovereignty, which is not the prerogative of a few, but the right of all.

The cold war represented an international order dominated by two super-Powers and held in check by nuclear weapons. Today's world is economically more united, but politically more divided. The watchword of the economy is deregulation. But politics requires rules if we do not want anarchy to prevail. Unlike the market, in politics no invisible hand can generate peace and prosperity. What we need is a visible hand that enacts rules and regulations, and obliges States to respect them, both beyond their borders and in the treatment of their citizens. Let us make the United Nations the visible hand of peace and prosperity. This may be the greatest challenge awaiting us. We must face it together, here in this forum, and place it at the centre of the upcoming debate on the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to remind representatives that, in accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its third plenary meeting, on 17 September 1999, the list of speakers will be closed today at 6 p.m.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign and Political Affairs of San Marino, His Excellency Mr. Gabriele Gatti.

Mr. Gatti (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian; English text furnished by the delegation*): Mr. President, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of San Marino, I wish to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of