



6 September 2000

## **Press Release**

### **SG/SM/7533**

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#### **SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS ON WORLD LEADERS TO DECIDE PRIORITIES AND ADAPT THE UNITED NATIONS TO MEET THEM**

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The following is the text of the Secretary-General's opening address to the Millennium Summit:

I much regret to have to open our proceedings on a somber note. The safety of United Nations personnel, in both peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, is a matter of vital concern to all of us. Before delivering my prepared statement, therefore, I must inform the heads of State and government of a tragedy that has occurred in West Timor.

A few hours ago, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Atambua was deliberately attacked by a militia opposed to the independence of East Timor. My Special Representative in East Timor has informed me that at least three international staff were killed. The rest of the staff are being evacuated to East Timor.

This tragedy underlines once again the dangers faced by unarmed humanitarian workers serving the United Nations in conflict or post-conflict situations. The Security Council, and I myself, have repeatedly expressed concern about the safety of United Nations personnel in the field, both military and civilian.

I have taken up the matter up with the Indonesian Government at the highest level, and will keep you informed.

May I ask the Assembly to observe one minute of silence, in honour of those brave colleagues who have lost their lives.

I am deeply honoured to welcome you all.

Never before have the leaders of so many nations come together in a single Assembly. This is a unique event. A unique opportunity. And therefore a unique responsibility. You,

ladies and gentlemen, are the leaders to whom the world's peoples have entrusted their destiny.

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They look to you to protect them from the great dangers of our time; and to ensure that all of them can share in its great achievements.

In an age when human beings have learnt the code of human life, and can transmit their knowledge in seconds from one continent to another, no mother in the world can understand why her child should be left to die, of malnutrition or preventable disease.

No one can understand why they should be driven from their home, or imprisoned or tortured for expressing their beliefs.

No one can understand why the soil their parents tilled has turned to desert, or why their skills have become useless and their family is left hungry.

People know that these challenges cannot be met by one country alone, or by government alone. Change cannot be held back by frontiers. Human progress has always come from individual and local initiatives, freely devised and then freely adapted elsewhere.

Your job, as political leaders, is to encourage such initiatives. To make sure they are not stifled, and that all your peoples can benefit from them. And to limit, or to compensate for, the adverse effects that change always has, on some people, somewhere.

Your peoples look to you for a common effort to solve their problems. They expect you to work together, as governments. And they expect you to work together with all the other institutions -- profit and non-profit, public and private -- where human beings join hands to promote their ideas and their interests.

People want to see this happen between neighbouring countries, and among all the countries of each region. But since today's biggest challenges are global, they expect above all that we will work together at the global level, as the United Nations.

My friends, that is why we are here. We are here to strengthen and adapt this great institution, forged 55 years ago in the crucible of war, so that it can do what people expect of it in the new era -- an era in which rule of law must prevail.

Last month I sent you a report, produced by a panel of experts, which makes detailed suggestions for strengthening the United Nations in the crucial area of peace and security -- the area where people look especially to the State, and where the world's peoples look to the United Nations, to save them "from the scourge of war". Please consider that report very seriously.

It is not only in that field, however, that the United Nations needs strengthening. We must strengthen it across the whole range of our activities.

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Au début de l'année, dans mon propre rapport du Millénaire, j'ai suggéré certains moyens de faire de l'Organisation un outil plus efficace, mieux à même d'améliorer l'existence de chacun, où qu'il se trouve.

Certaines des initiatives concrètes que j'ai annoncées dans ce rapport sont d'ores et déjà dans la phase-pilote. Elles constituent autant d'exemples encourageants de partenariats novateurs que l'ONU devra soutenir à l'avenir.

Je suis enchanté que les États Membres aient jugé utile de s'appuyer sur mon rapport pour établir la déclaration politique que vous vous proposez d'adopter à l'issue de ce Sommet.

Je vous conjure, cela étant, de ne pas vous satisfaire d'intentions. Mais de traiter votre déclaration en plan d'action, et de vous assurer qu'il y sera pleinement donné suite.

We need to decide our priorities. And we must adapt our United Nations, so that in future those priorities are reflected in clear and prompt decisions, leading to real change in peoples' lives.

That, my friends, is what the peoples expect of us. Let us not disappoint them.

Thank you.

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