

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At New York University's Center for Global Affairs and the Center on International Cooperation, "A New Course in the World, a New Approach at the UN," August 12, 2009

Thank you, Bruce, for that incredibly kind introduction. I don't think it gets any nicer than that, so I am very grateful. I am also very grateful to Lynne Brown for all her work to pull this event together and to Bruce and Vera Jelinek for their warm welcome here at NYU. And I'm also pleased to see so many friends and colleagues here in the audience, including the distinguished former President of NYU, Congressman John Brademas.

I'm frankly delighted to be at this marvelous institution, because NYU, despite what Vera says, reaches today far beyond New York City. Yours is truly a global institution, with campuses from Accra to Abu Dhabi. NYU's Centers for Global Affairs and International Cooperation are doing pioneering work in international relations, which is a tribute to the cutting-edge scholarship of its faculty, staff, and students, under the able leadership of Bruce and Vera. These Centers, as many of you well know, are major contributors to the intellectual life of the United Nations.

Your innovative contributions are especially valuable at the start of this new century, at a time when the world is morphing by the minute. As you and others in the academy seek more certain paths across a rapidly shifting global landscape, we too in the U.S. Government are reshaping and renewing American leadership for a very different era.

Six months into the new Administration, as we look ahead to the opening of the 64th General Assembly next month, many of my colleagues on the President's national security team have been outlining how their departments and organizations are implementing the President's national security strategy. Secretary of State Clinton recently explained the ways that our diplomacy furthers U.S. interests by building new partnerships, promoting universally held values, and reinforcing the power of our example. Secretary of Defense Gates is reorienting our armed forces for the unconventional, irregular conflicts of the 21st century.

Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano recently highlighted the local, state, federal and international partnerships that we need to keep America secure from catastrophic terrorism. John Brennan, the President's principal advisor on counterterrorism, just last week detailed our new approach to safeguarding the American people from the evolving threat of al-Qaeda and other violent extremists. And General Jones, the President's National Security Advisor, explained how the Administration will tackle transnational challenges through a newly integrated National Security Staff at the White House.

And today, as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, I'd like to offer some thoughts about how the United States is changing the course it charts in the world—and how, consistent with our new direction, we are rather dramatically changing our approach to the United Nations.

That change is essential because we face an extraordinary array of global challenges: poorly guarded nuclear weapons and material, a global financial meltdown, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran and North Korea building their nuclear weapons capabilities, al-Qaeda and its affiliates, genocide and mass atrocities, cyber attacks on our digital infrastructure, international crime and drug trafficking, pandemics, and a climate that is warming by the day. These are transnational security threats that cross national borders as freely as a storm. By definition, they cannot be tackled by any one country alone.

Since taking office, the Obama Administration has acted internationally on the basis of three core premises. First, the global challenges we face cannot be met without U.S. leadership. But second, while U.S. leadership is necessary, it's rarely sufficient. We need the effective cooperation of a broad range of friends and partners. And third, others will likely shoulder a greater share of the global burden if the United States leads by example, acknowledges mistakes, corrects course when necessary, forges strategies in partnership and treats others with respect.

The reach, scale, and complexity of these 21st-century security challenges put unprecedented demands on states and the entire infrastructure of international cooperation that we helped to build after 1945. If ever there were a time for effective multilateral cooperation in pursuit of U.S. interests and a shared future of greater peace and prosperity, it is now. We stand at a true crossroads. We must move urgently to reinvigorate the basis for common action. The bedrock of that cooperation must be a community of states committed to solving collective problems and capable of meeting the responsibilities of effective sovereignty.

A fundamental imperative of U.S. national security in the 21st century is thus clear: we need to maximize the number of states with both the capacity and the will to tackle this new generation of transnational challenges. We need a modern edifice of cooperation, built upon the foundation of responsible American leadership, with the bricks of state capacity and the beams of political will.

Let me elaborate a little bit more on the bedrock issues of state capacity and state will.

The United States needs to grow the ranks of capable, democratic states—states that can deliver both on their international responsibilities and their domestic responsibilities to their own people. Capable states control their territory, govern justly, provide security and essential services, protect their citizens' rights, and offer their people hope for a better future. When a country cannot—or will not—perform these core functions, when a nation is wracked by war, when a state becomes a shell, its people suffer immediately. But over the longer term, a fragile state can also incubate global trouble that can spread far beyond its borders. And that is where the transnational threats of the 21st century too often begin.

In the past, many dismissed poverty, hunger, and despair in faraway countries as other people's problems, preferring to focus on the supposedly "hard" questions of war and power. But in a globalized age, the troubles that ravage fragile states can ultimately menace sturdy ones.

Standing aside while the world's most vulnerable endure conflict, disease, and despair is surely a breach of our common humanity. But it is also a threat to our common security.

Our values compel us to reduce poverty, disease, and hunger, to end preventable deaths of mothers and children, and to build self-sufficiency in agriculture, health, and education. But so too does our national interest. Whether the peril is terrorism, pandemics, narcotics, human trafficking, or civil strife, a state so weak that it incubates a threat is also a state too weak to contain a threat.

In the 21st century, therefore we can have no doubt: as President Obama has said time and again, America's security and wellbeing are inextricably linked to those of people everywhere.

Building the capacity of fragile states is a major part of our work every day at the United Nations, since it is the UN that is leading the charge in many of the toughest corners of the world. At its best, the UN helps rebuild shattered societies, lay the foundations of democracy and development, and establish conditions in which people can live in dignity and mutual respect. I have seen first-hand how the UN delivers—in Haiti, where peacekeepers flushed out deadly gangs from the notorious Cité Soleil slum and now are training a reformed Haitian police force. I have seen it in Liberia, where the UN Development Program supports impressive efforts to teach literacy, computer skills, and trade skills to jobless ex-combatants. I have seen it in Congo, where the UN has made it possible to hold the first democratic elections in that country's history.

It is not enough though simply to build up the corps of capable, democratic states. We need states with both the capacity and the will to tackle common challenges. As we have been reminded in recent years, we cannot take that will for granted, even among our closest allies. The simple reality is this: if we want others to help combat the threats that concern us most, then we must help others combat the challenges that threaten them most. For many nations, those threats are first and foremost the things that afflict human beings in their daily lives: corruption, repression, conflict, hunger, poverty, disease, and a lack of education and opportunity.

When the United States joins others to confront these challenges, it's not charity. It's not even barter. In today's world, more than ever, America's interests and our values converge. What is good for others is often good for us. When we manifest our commitment to tackling the threats that menace so many other nations; when we invest in protecting the lives of others; and when we recognize that national security is no longer a zero-sum game, then we increase other countries' will to cooperate on the issues most vital to us.

We build that will by demonstrating responsible leadership. We build will by setting a tone of decency and mutual respect rather than condescension and contempt. We build will by abiding by the rules we expect others to follow. We build will by pursuing pragmatic, principled policies and explain them with intelligence and candor. And in the broadest sense, we build will when others can see their future as aligned with ours.

All of this helps explain why so many of America's security interests come together today at the United Nations. Day in and day out, my colleagues and I at the U.S. Mission to the UN are working to build the will of countries to cooperate and to strengthen their means to act. We are actually on the front lines of what President Obama calls "a new era of engagement."

And that is why, I have to confess, it is actually a great time to be the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Everyone notices when a superpower becomes an agent of change—in word and deed, in policy and tone. We are demonstrating that the United States is willing to listen, respect differences, and consider new ideas.

In both the Security Council and the General Assembly, we seek to forge common purpose with other nations. But the fact is: we cannot and will not always agree. Some things are not negotiable. We will always choose to stand firmly on principle rather than fade like cowards into a crowd.

And we have no illusions. A serious gap still separates the vision of the UN's founders from the institution of today. The Security Council is less riven than it was in the coldest days of the Cold War, but it still stumbles when interests and values diverge, as they do over such issues as Darfur, Zimbabwe, and Burma. In the General Assembly, member states still often let political theater distract from real deliberation and decision. Israel is still unfairly singled out. And the UN system still must confront waste and abuse even as it struggles to meet daunting new responsibilities for peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and development.

As President Obama has said, the UN is imperfect; but it is also indispensable. There can be no substitute for the legitimacy the UN can impart or its potential to mobilize the widest possible coalitions. There is no better alternative to sharing the costs and burdens of UN peace operations and humanitarian missions around the world. There is no doubt that we are more secure when the UN can foster nonproliferation and promote disarmament. It is we, along with others, who gain when the UN spurs sustainable development and democracy, improves global health, upholds women's rights, and broadens access to education. And we reap the benefits when the UN sets little-known global standards that enable our cell phones to work properly and our airplanes to fly more safely.

In short, the UN is essential to our efforts to galvanize concerted actions that make Americans safer and more secure.

Today, as we steer a new course at the United Nations, our guiding principles are clear: We value the UN as a vehicle for advancing U.S. policies and universal rights. We work for change from within rather than criticizing from the sidelines. We stand strong in defense of America's interests and values, but we don't dissent just to be contrary. We listen to states great and small. We build coalitions. We meet our responsibilities. We pay our bills. We push for real reform. And we remember that, in an interconnected world, what's good for others is often good for the United States as well.

Let me share with you six ways that we are putting these principles into practice every day.

First, we work at the UN to promote America's core security interests. Consider North Korea. We recently negotiated a unanimous Security Council resolution imposing the toughest array of sanctions on any country in the world today—including new asset freezes, sweeping financial sanctions, a complete embargo on arms exports, and an unprecedented set of obligations for the

inspection of suspect vessels. These sanctions are aimed at pressing North Korea to fulfill its commitments and at achieving the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

We also continue to work in the Security Council to ensure that Iran meets its international obligations.

In both cases, our efforts are advancing one of President Obama's top priorities: nuclear nonproliferation. Through the UN's Conference on Disarmament, the U.S. is seeking a new treaty to verifiably end the production of fissile materials. We can thereby reduce the chance that al-Qaeda or another terrorist group could lay hands on nuclear weapons or their deadly material. We're aiming to achieve a successful NPT Review Conference next year. And this year, next month, on September 24, during the U.S. Presidency of the Security Council, President Obama will chair a rare summit meeting of the Council to create a new momentum toward nonproliferation, nuclear security and disarmament.

The UN is also playing vital roles in two countries at the top of our national security agenda where American troops are in harm's way. In Iraq, the UN is providing expert advice on elections, mediating the longstanding internal boundary disputes between Arabs and Kurds, and assisting Iraqi citizens displaced by war.

In Afghanistan, the UN is helping to promote political development, coordinate donor assistance, support the August 20 elections, and build the capabilities of the Afghan state. All of this buttresses our comprehensive, new international strategy for Afghanistan.

And elsewhere, the UN strengthens America's security by preventing the smoldering embers of conflict from blazing back to life. For 60 years, the UN has played a crucial role in ending violent conflicts in such places as Korea, Namibia, Mozambique, Guatemala, Cyprus, the Golan Heights, Haiti, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Where people are suffering—where conflict is enduring—where hope is fleeting—that is where you will find the United Nations.

Second, we participate constructively. Rather than throw up our hands, we roll up our sleeves to get things done.

Consider the UN Human Rights Council. Through three election cycles, the United States refused to seek a seat, dismissing the Council as flawed and anti-Israel—which obviously it is. But what did this approach achieve? Dictators were not called to account for their records of repression; abused citizens did not have their voices heard; obsessive, unproductive Israel-bashing raged on.

So in May, we changed course and we won a seat on the Human Rights Council with 90 percent of the votes cast. We join this body well aware that, in many ways, the Human Rights Council is the poster child for what ails the UN. But sitting on the outside will not stop the posturing in Geneva nor defend those bleeding under the boot of despots.

Real change does not come from sitting on the sidelines. Real change can only come through painstaking, principled diplomacy. So we will work hard to reduce customary divisions. We will demand fair treatment for Israel. We will amplify the voices of those suffering under the world's cruelest regimes. And we will lead by example through our actions at home and our support for those risking their lives for democracy and human rights abroad.

It will not be easy. It will not be quick. But let's remember the words of a former university president who once said, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." Well, if you think engagement is imperfect, try isolation.

Third, we stand firm on principle and resolute on the issues that matter most—but we are resisting indulging in petty battles. In the past, we have sometimes let ourselves be defined by what we stand against, not what we stand for. Well no more. Over the past six months, the United States has taken a fresh look at our positions across the board—including some policies that left us and others scratching their heads to understand what we objected to—policies that failed to advance our interests or our values.

And that's why we have taken concrete steps in a new direction. We have changed course, embracing as our own the Millennium Development Goals, which the United States once shunned. We rescinded the Mexico City policy that barred U.S. assistance to programs that support family planning and reproductive health services. We stopped withholding U.S. contributions to the UN Population Fund. We signed the first new human rights convention of the 21st century, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We reversed course to back a General Assembly resolution, excuse me, statement opposing violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation. We no longer oppose mentions of reproductive health or the International Criminal Court. We no longer balk at every reference to the "right to food" or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. And we're forging a new path on climate change commensurate with our global responsibilities.

These steps contribute to a world that is more prosperous, more peaceful, and more aligned with the universal values that this nation was founded upon. Through word and deed, the United States is showing that we are ready to lead once more.

Fourth, we seek constructive working relations with countries large and small. While we pursue more effective cooperation among the Security Council's five permanent members, we are also mindful of the fact that the Council has not just five members but 15, and that the UN has 192 in total. All of them vote in the General Assembly, and more than half of the UN's membership consists of small states with populations of less than 10 million people.

So we're reaching out not just to "the Permanent Five" and to our Western partners but to nations of all sizes in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands—and to the dozens of Muslim-majority countries, many of whose Ambassadors gathered at my residence to watch President Obama's historic speech in Cairo.

We will work with the vast majority of countries on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect and we will do so to bridge old divides, resisting the efforts of a handful to spoil shared

progress. The rifts between North and South are almost as outdated as those between East and West. Yet there's still a widespread perception at the UN that the North cares only about security, and the South cares only about development. But such truisms ignore a central truth: there can be no security without development; and there can be no sustained development without security. These old-school rifts belie today's realities. Our fates are not opposed; they are intertwined.

And that makes engaging across the full UN membership much more than good manners. It's also smart diplomacy. So we invest in relationships, because in diplomacy, as in life, it can make the difference.

Take the recent vote in Geneva about whether to end the Human Rights Council's mandate for the Special Rapporteur on Sudan—the only international mechanism that looks at abuses countrywide. In June, the Human Rights Council voted to keep the independent expert for Sudan on the job—by just one vote.

Or take the recent coup in Honduras, where the United States was able to work with a broad range of Western Hemisphere nations in the General Assembly to give clear and constructive voice to global condemnation.

As President Obama has made clear, we did so for a simple reason: if the United States is to support democracy abroad, then we must respect the universal principle that people should choose their own leaders freely—whether they are leaders we agree with or not. That is how you live your values. That is how you lay the foundation for democratic growth that spreads peace and prosperity.

Fifth, we meet our obligations. As we call upon others to help reform and strengthen the UN, the United States must do its part—and pay its bills. Our dues to the United Nations are treaty obligations, and we are committed to working with Congress to pay them in full and on time.

Thanks to strong support from Congress, we are now able to clear U.S. arrears to the UN's regular budget and to those on the peacekeeping budget, which accumulated between 2005 and 2008. And we will meet our 2009 peacekeeping obligations in full.

The Administration's Fiscal Year 2010 budget request, if fully funded by Congress, will keep us current on both our regular and peacekeeping accounts—and allow us to move toward ending the practice, started in the 1980s, of paying our bills to the UN and many other major international organizations nearly a year late. The United States cannot lead from a position of strength while we are awash in arrears. We cannot champion important UN missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and then turn around and oppose the budgets to fund them. So we will continue to work with Congress in a bipartisan spirit to meet our responsibilities.

And finally, we push for serious reform. All the world's citizens deserve a UN that runs right. So we are working to strengthen the UN's ability to deliver responsibly. It's not enough that costs be contained and funds spent without corruption; each dollar must serve its intended

purpose, be it for development or peacekeeping. The UN needs greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Central to our reform effort is our focus on the next generation of UN peacekeeping. UN missions have saved untold lives, averted numerous wars, and helped restore or establish democratic rule in more than a dozen countries. But the system is under severe strain. More than 115,000 military, police, and civilian peacekeepers are now deployed in 15 operations around the world—often in areas where there is hardly any peace to keep.

So we need mission mandates that are more credible and achievable. We need peacekeeping operations to be planned expertly, deployed quickly, budgeted realistically, equipped seriously, led ably, and ended responsibly. And we need to strengthen the security sector and the rule of law in such places as Liberia and Haiti so that peacekeepers can return home certain that their missions are truly accomplished.

We will increase U.S. support to UN peacekeeping—including by being willing to contribute more U.S. military staff officers, military observers, civilian police, and other civilian personnel to UN missions and by refocusing the U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative on helping partner countries train their own peacekeepers. We are encouraging others to do more as well.

At the same time, we aim to ensure the UN has the management culture and leadership it needs to succeed. Our priorities are greater transparency and accountability, stronger ethics and oversight mechanisms, and buttressing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's initiatives to overhaul the UN's procurement and human resources practices.

Today's United Nations is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise facing greater demands than ever in more places than ever. As in any organization, there is no substitute for first-rate leadership. Both at UN Headquarters and in the field, far-sighted, hard-driving, broad-minded UN officials can make all the difference in the world. We want to work with others to continue to identify, promote, and empower.

UN reform also means realizing the full potential of the majority of the world's population: the world's women. That's why we are strengthening the UN instruments that advance the status of women. The current structures are often uncoordinated, inefficient, and ineffective. We are committed to a streamlined, empowered UN architecture to combat rape, sexual slavery, and discrimination and to secure universal rights, equality, and expanded opportunity for women. That will advance the cause of human rights, and it will advance security and prosperity as well.

I want to conclude by reinforcing a simple message: the United Nations is vital to our efforts to craft a better, safer world.

We have inherited a vast array of challenges. The world will no doubt hurl others at us. But we are not daunted. We are determined. We are advancing the vision, strategies, and programs that will renew America's leadership, strengthen our security, uphold our values, deepen our prosperity, and reinforce the alliances and partnerships that multiply our strength.

There will continue to be setbacks and frustrations. There will be differences that remain intractable and predicaments that feel hopeless.

But we've seen the costs of disengaging. We have paid the price of stiff-arming the UN and spurning our international partners. The United States will lead in the 21st century—not with hubris, not by hectoring, but through patient diplomacy and a steadfast resolve to strengthen our common security by investing in our common humanity.

Just six months ago, in his Inaugural Address, President Obama said: “To all other peoples and governments... from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: Know that America is a friend to each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more.”

Just six months into the new Administration, we are putting those words into practice. One can see it in concerted international action to tackle the global financial crisis. We see it in warmer ties with our allies and in more productive relationships with Russia and China. We see it in a fresh U.S. determination to work for a world free of nuclear weapons and the peril of proliferation.

We see it in a transformed U.S. approach that supports Iraqi sovereignty as we responsibly redeploy all of our forces. We see it in a comprehensive new strategy to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and its extremist affiliates and to deny them safe haven in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We see it in vigorous U.S. efforts to broker the two-state solution that Israelis need to live in peace and security and that Palestinians need to realize their legitimate rights and aspirations for statehood, dignity, and prosperity. We see it in the ongoing outreach by the United States to Muslims around the world, exemplified by President Obama's historic speech in Cairo.

We see it in the early decision to close Guantanamo within a year, to prohibit “enhanced interrogation techniques,” and to make it plain that America does not torture. And we see it in vigorous efforts to tackle climate change, as we acknowledge both science and our own responsibilities for the environment we share.

Those changes are not just happening in Washington and in foreign capitals. They are happening here—at the imperfect yet indispensable institution where I am proud to represent our country. This is the work that my colleagues and I do, day in and day out.

We work with passion and resolve, because we know that the change that has come to America can also change the world. The time for action is now. The challenges we face are vast. But the opportunities are even greater. And we will seize them—because the United States is back.

Thank you very much.

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