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ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO THE 44TH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

United Nations Headquarters
New York, New York

September 25, 1989

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, distinguished delegates of the United Nations: I am honored to speak to you today as you open the 44th Session of the General Assembly.

I would like to congratulate Joseph Garba of Nigeria -- a distinguished diplomat -- on his election as President of this session of the General Assembly, and I wish him success in his Presidency.

I feel a great personal pleasure on this occasion. This is a homecoming for me. The memories of my time here in 1971 and 1972 are still with me today -- the human moments -- the humorous moments -- that are part of even the highest undertaking.

Let me share one story -- from one of the many sessions of the Security Council. I was 45 minutes late getting to the meeting -- and all 45 minutes were filled by the first speaker to take the floor. When I walked in and took my seat, the speaker paused and said with great courtesy: "I welcome the Permanent Representative of the United States, and now -- for his benefit -- I will start my speech again -- from the beginning." At that moment, differences of alliance and ideology didn't matter. The universal groan that went up around the table -- from every member present -- and the laughter that followed -- united us all.

Today, I would like to begin by recognizing the current permanent representatives with whom I served. Roberto Martinez-Ordonez. Blaise Rabetafika. Permanent Observer John Dube.

It's wonderful to look around and see so many familiar faces -- foreign ministers, members of the Secretariat, delegates. And of course Mr. Secretary General -- you were Permanent Representative for your country when we served together and Under Secretary Abby Farah -- you were a Permanent Representative back then, too. It's an honor to be back with you in this historic hall.

The United Nations was established 44 years ago upon the ashes of war -- and amidst great hopes. And the United Nations can do great things. No, the UN isn't perfect. It's not a panacea for the world's problems. But it is a vital forum where the nations of the world seek to replace conflict with consensus -- and it must remain a forum for peace.

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The UN is moving closer to that ideal. And it has the support of the United States of America. In recent years -- certainly since my time here -- the war of words that has often echoed in this chamber is giving way to a new mood. We've seen a welcome shift -- from polemics to peacekeeping.

UN peacekeeping forces are on duty right now -- and over the years, more than 700 Peacekeepers have given their lives in service to the United Nations. Today, I want to remember one of these soldiers of peace. An American -- on a mission of peace under the UN flag -- on a mission for all the world. A man of unquestioned bravery and unswerving dedication to the UN ideal: Lt. Col. William Richard Higgins.

I call on the General Assembly to condemn the murder of this soldier of peace -- and call on those responsible to return his remains to his family. And let us all right now -- right here -- rededicate ourselves and our nations to the cause that Colonel Higgins served so selflessly.

The founders of this historic institution believed that it was here that the nations of the world might come to agree that law -- not force -- shall govern. And the United Nations can play a fundamental role in the central issue of our time. For today, there is an idea at work around the globe -- an idea of undeniable force. That idea is: Freedom.

Freedom's advance is evident everywhere. In Central Europe; in Hungary -- where state and society are now in the midst of a movement towards political pluralism and a free market economy. Where the barrier that once enforced an unnatural division between Hungary and its neighbors to the West has been torn down -- replaced by a new hope for the future -- new hope in freedom.

We see freedom at work in Poland -- where, in deference to the will of the people, the Communist Party has relinquished its monopoly on power. And in the Soviet Union -- where the world hears the voices of people no longer afraid to speak out, or to assert the right to rule themselves.

But freedom's march is not confined to a single continent -- or to the developed world alone.

We see the rise of freedom in Latin America -- where, one by one, dictatorships are giving way to democracy.

We see it on the continent of Africa -- where more and more nations see in the system of free enterprise, salvation for economies crippled by excessive state control.

East and West -- North and South; on every continent, on every horizon, we can see the outlines of a new world of freedom.

Of course, freedom's work remains unfinished. The trend we see is not yet universal. Some regimes still stand against the tide. Some rulers still deny the right of the people to govern themselves. But now, the power of prejudice and despotism is challenged. Never before have these regimes stood so isolated and alone -- so out of step with the steady advance of freedom.

Today, we are witnessing an ideological collapse -- the demise of the totalitarian idea of the omniscient, all-powerful State.

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There are many reasons for this collapse. But in the end, one fact alone explains what we see today: Advocates of the totalitarian idea saw its triumph written in the laws of history. They failed to see the love of freedom written in the human heart.

Two hundred years ago today, the United States Congress proposed the Bill of Rights -- fundamental freedoms belonging to every individual. Rights no government can deny. Those same rights have been recognized in this congress of nations -- in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations."

From where we stand -- on the threshold of this new world of freedom -- the trend is clear enough. If, for those who write the history of our times, the 20th century is remembered as the century of the State -- the 21st must be an era of emancipation -- the age of the Individual.

Make no mistake: Nothing can stand in the way of freedom's march. There will come a day when freedom is seen the world over to be the universal birthright of every man and woman -- of every race and walk of life. Even under the worst of circumstances, at the darkest of times, freedom has always remained alive -- a distant dream, perhaps, but always alive.

Today, that dream is no longer distant. For the first time, for millions around the world -- a new world of freedom is within reach. Today -- is freedom's moment.

You see, the possibility now exists for the creation of a true community of nations -- built on shared interests and ideals. A true community -- a world where free governments and free markets meet the rising desire of the people to control their own destiny: to live in dignity, and to exercise freely their fundamental human rights.

It is time we worked together to deliver that destiny into the hands of men and women everywhere.

Our challenge is to strengthen the foundations of freedom -- encourage its advance, and face our most urgent challenges. The global challenges of the 21st Century: economic health, environmental well-being, and the great questions of war and peace.

First, global economic growth. During this decade, a number of developing nations have moved into the ranks of the world's most advanced economies -- all of them -- each and every one -- powered by the engine of free enterprise.

In the decade ahead, others can join their ranks. But -- for many nations -- barriers stand in the way. In the case of some countries, these are obstacles of their own making: unnecessary restrictions and regulations that act as dead weights on their own economies and obstacles to foreign trade.

But other barriers to growth exist, and those too require effective action. Too many developing countries struggle today under a burden of debt that makes growth all but impossible. The nations of the world deserve a better opportunity to achieve a measure of control over their own economic fate, and build better lives for their own people.

The approach the U.S. has put forward -- the Brady Plan -- will help these nations reduce that debt -- and at the same time encourage the free market reforms that will fuel growth.

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In just two days I will be speaking to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. I'll discuss there in more detail steps our nations can take in dealing with the debt problem. But I can say now: The new world of freedom is not a world where a few nations live in comfort, while others live in want.

The power of commerce is a force for progress. Open markets are the key to continued growth in the developing world. Today, the United States buys over one-half of the manufactured exports that all the developing nations combined sell to the industrialized world. It's time for the other advanced economies to follow suit -- to create expanded opportunities for trade.

I believe we'll learn in the century ahead that many nations of the world have barely begun to tap their true potential for development. The free market and its fruits are not the special preserve of a few. They are a harvest everyone can share.

Beyond the challenge of global growth lies another issue of global magnitude: the environment. No line drawn on a map can stop the advance of pollution. Threats to our environment have become an international problem. We must develop an international approach to urgent environmental issues -- one that seeks common solutions to common problems.

The United Nations is already at work. On the question of global warming. In the effort to prevent oil spills and other disasters from fouling our seas and the air we breathe.

And I will tell you now: The United States will do its part. We've committed ourselves to the world-wide phase-out of all chlorofluorocarbons by the year 2000. We've proposed amending our Clean Air Act to ensure clean air for our citizens within a single generation. We've banned the import of ivory to protect the elephant and rhinoceros from the human predators who exterminate them for profit.

And we have begun to explore ways to work with other nations -- with the major industrialized democracies, in Poland and in Hungary -- to make common cause for the sake of our environment. The environment belongs to all of us. In our new world of freedom, the world's citizens must enjoy this common trust for generations to come.

Global economic growth -- the stewardship of our planet -- both are critical issues. But as always, questions of war and peace must be paramount to the United Nations.

We must move forward to limit -- and eliminate -- weapons of mass destruction. Five years ago, at the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, I presented a U.S. draft treaty outlawing chemical weapons. Since then, progress has been made -- but time is running out. The threat is growing. More than 20 nations now possess chemical weapons or the capability to produce them. And these horrible weapons are now finding their way into regional conflicts. This is unacceptable.

For the sake of mankind, we must halt and reverse this threat. Today, I want to announce steps the U.S. is ready to take -- steps to rid the world of these truly terrible weapons -- towards a treaty that will ban, eliminate, all chemical weapons from the earth ten years from the day it is signed.

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This initiative contains three major elements:

First, in the first eight years of a chemical weapons treaty, the U.S. is ready to destroy nearly all -- 98% -- of our chemical weapons -- stockpile -- provided the Soviet Union joins the ban. I think they will.

Second, we are ready to destroy all of our chemical weapons -- 100%, every one -- within ten years, once all nations capable of building chemical weapons sign the total ban treaty.

And third, the U.S. is ready to begin now. We'll eliminate more than 80% of our stockpile -- even as we work to complete a treaty -- if the Soviet Union joins us in cutting chemical weapons to an equal level, and we agree on inspections to verify that stockpiles are destroyed.

We know that monitoring a total ban on chemical weapons will be a challenge. But the knowledge we've gained from our recent arms control experience -- and our accelerating research in this area -- makes me believe we can achieve the level of verification that gives us confidence to go forward with the ban.

The world has lived too long in the shadow of chemical warfare. Let us act together -- beginning today -- to rid the earth of this scourge.

We are serious about achieving conventional arms reductions as well. That's why we tabled new proposals just last Thursday at the Conventional Forces in Europe negotiations in Vienna -- proposals that demonstrate our commitment to act rapidly to ease military tensions in Europe, and move the nations of that continent one step closer to their common destiny: a Europe whole and free.

And the United States is convinced that open and innovative measures can move disarmament forward -- and also ease international tensions. That's the idea behind the Open Skies proposal the Soviets have now indicated they are willing to pursue. It's the idea behind the Open Lands proposal -- permitting, for the first time ever, free travel for all Soviet and American diplomats throughout each other's countries. Openness is the enemy of mistrust -- and every step towards a more open world is a step towards the new world we seek.

And let me make this comment on our meetings with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze over the past few days. I am very pleased by the progress we made. The Soviet Union removed a number of obstacles to progress on conventional and strategic arms reductions. We reached agreements in principle on issues from verification to nuclear testing. And of course, we agreed to a summit in the spring or early summer of 1990.

Each of these achievements is important in its own right -- but they are more important still as signs of a new attitude that prevails between the U.S. and USSR. Serious differences remain -- but the willingness to deal constructively and candidly -- with those differences is news that we -- and indeed the world -- must welcome.

We have not entered an era of perpetual peace. The threats to peace that nations face may today be changing -- but they have not vanished. In fact, in a number of regions around the world, a dangerous combination is now emerging: Regimes armed with old and unappeasable animosities -- and modern weapons of mass destruction.

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This development will raise the stakes whenever war breaks out. Regional conflict may well threaten world peace as never before.

The challenge of preserving peace is a personal one for all of you here in this hall. The United Nations can be a mediator -- a forum where parties in conflict come in search of peaceful solutions.

For the sake of peace, the UN must redouble its support for the peace efforts now underway in regions of conflict all over the world. And let me assure you: The U.S. is determined to take an active role in settling regional conflicts. Sometimes, our role in regional disputes is and will be highly public. Sometimes, like many of you, we work quietly -- behind the scenes. But always -- we are working for positive change and lasting peace.

Our world faces other, less conventional threats -- no less dangerous to international peace and stability. Illegal drugs are a menace to social order and a source of human misery wherever they gain a foothold. The nations who suffer this scourge must join forces in the fight. And we are. Let me salute the commitment and extraordinary courage of one country in particular -- Colombia -- where we are working with the people and their President, Virgilio Barco, to put the drug cartels out of business, and bring the drug lords to justice.

Finally, we must join forces to combat the threat of terrorism. Every nation -- and the United Nations -- must send the outlaws of the world a clear message: Hostage taking and the terror of random violence are methods that cannot win the world's approval. Terrorism of any kind is repugnant to all values a civilized world holds in common. And make no mistake: Terrorism is a means that no end -- no matter how just -- can sanctify.

Whatever the challenge, freedom greatly raises the chances of our success. Freedom's moment is a time of hope for all the world. Because freedom -- once set in motion -- takes on a momentum of its own.

As I said the day I assumed the Presidency: "We don't have to talk late into the night about which form of government is better." We know that free government -- democracy -- is best.

I believe that is the hard-won truth of our time -- the unassailable fact that still stands at the end of a century of great struggle and human suffering.

And this is true not because all our differences must give way to democracy -- but because democracy makes room for all our differences. In democracy, diversity finds its common home.

At the very heart of the democratic ideal is respect -- for freedom of belief, freedom of thought and action in all its diversity -- for human rights. The world has experienced enough of the ideologies that have promised to remake man in some new and better image. We've seen the colossal tragedies and dashed hopes. *We know now that freedom and democracy hold the answers.* What men and nations want is the freedom to live by their own lights, and a chance to prosper in peace.

When I began today, I spoke to you about peacekeeping. I want to speak to you now about peacemaking. We must bring peace to the people who have never known its blessings.

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There's a painting that hangs on the wall of my office in the White House. It pictures President Lincoln and his generals, meeting near the end of a war that remains the bloodiest in American history. Outside, at that moment, a battle rages. And yet what we see in the distance is a rainbow -- a symbol of hope, of the passing of the storm. That painting is called "The Peacemakers." For me, it is a constant reminder that our struggle -- the struggle for peace -- is a struggle blessed by hope.

I do remember sitting in this hall. I remember the mutual respect among all of us proudly serving as representatives. I remember the almost endless speeches, Security Council sessions. The receptions and receiving lines. The formal meetings of this Assembly -- and the informal discussions in the Delegates' Lounge.

And I remember something more. Something beyond the frantic pace and sometimes frustrating experiences of daily life here: The heartbeat of the United Nations -- the quiet conviction that we could make the world more peaceful. More free.

What we sought then, now lies within our reach. I ask each of you here in this hall: Can we not bring a unity of purpose to the United Nations? Can we not make this new world of freedom the common destiny we seek?

I believe we can. I know we must.

My solemn wish today is that here -- among the United Nations -- that spirit will take hold, and that all men and all nations will make freedom's moment their own.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the work of the United Nations.

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