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PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON  
ADDRESSES THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
THE UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK  
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1993  
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PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you very much.

Mr. President, let me first congratulate you on your  
election as president of this General Assembly.

Mr. Secretary General, distinguished delegates and guests,  
it is a great honor for me to address you and to stand in this  
great chamber which symbolizes so much of the 20th century: its  
darkest crises and its brightest aspirations.

I come before you as the first American president born  
after the founding of the United Nations. Like most of the  
people in the world today, I was not even alive during the  
convulsive world war that convinced humankind of the need for  
this organization, nor during the San Francisco conference that  
led to its birth. Yet I have followed the work of the United  
Nations throughout my life with admiration for its  
accomplishments, with sadness for its failures, and conviction  
that through common efforts our generation can take the bold  
steps needed to redeem the mission entrusted to the U.N. 48  
years ago. I pledge to you that my nation remains committed to  
helping make the U.N.'s vision a reality.

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The start of this general assembly offers us an opportunity to take stock of where we are as common shareholders in the progress of humankind and in the preservation of our planet. It is clear that we live at a turning point in human history.

Immense and promising changes seem to wash over us every day. The Cold War is over. The world is no longer divided into two armed and angry camps. Dozens of new democracies have been born.

It is a moment of miracles. We see Nelson Mandela stand side by side with President de Klerk proclaiming a date for South Africa's first non-racial election. We see Russia's first popularly elected president, Boris Yeltsin, leading his nation on its bold democratic journey. We have seen decades of deadlock shattered in the Middle East as the prime minister of Israel and the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization reached past enmity and suspicion to shake each other's hands and exhilarate the entire world with the hope of peace. We have begun to see the doomsday weapon of nuclear annihilation dismantled and destroyed.

Thirty-two years ago President Kennedy warned this chamber that humanity lived under a nuclear sword of Damocles that hung by the slenderest of threads. Now the United States is working with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and others to take that sword down and lock it away in a secure vault where we hope and pray it will remain forever.

It is a new era in this hall as well.

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The superpower stand-off that for so long stymied the United Nations' work almost from its first day has now yielded to a new promise of practical cooperation. Yet today, we must all admit that there are two powerful tendencies working from opposite directions to challenge the authority of nation states everywhere and to undermine the authority of nation states to work together.

From beyond nations, economic and technological forces all over the globe are compelling the world toward integration. These forces are fueling a welcome explosion of entrepreneurship and political liberalization, but they also threaten to destroy the insularity and independence of national economies, quickening the pace of change and making many of our people feel more insecure. At the same time, from within nations, the resurgent aspirations of ethnic and religious groups challenge governments on terms that traditional nation states cannot easily accommodate. These twin forces lie at the heart of the challenges not only to our national government but also to all our international institutions. They require all of us in this room to find new ways to work together more effectively in pursuit of our national interests and to speak anew about whether our institutions of international cooperation are adequate to this moment.

Thus, as we marvel at this era's promise of new peace, we must also recognize that serious threats remain. Bloody ethnic, religious and civil wars rage, from Angola to the Caucasus to Kashmir. As weapons of mass destruction fall into more hands, even small conflicts can threaten to take on murderous proportions. Hunger and disease continue to take a tragic toll, especially among the world's children. The malignant neglect of our global environment threatens our children's health and their very security. The repression of conscience continues in too many nations, and terrorism, which has taken so many innocent lives, assumes a horrifying immediacy for us here, when militant fanatics bombed the World Trade Center and planned to attack even this very hall of peace. Let me assure you, whether the plotters of those crimes or the mass murderers who bombed Pan Am Flight 103, my government is determined to see that such terrorists are brought to justice. (Applause.)

At this moment of panoramic change, of vast opportunities

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and troubling threats, we must all ask ourselves what we can do and what we should do as a community of nations. We must once again dare to dream of what might be so our dreams may be within our reach. For that to happen, we must all be willing to honestly confront the challenges of the broader world. That has never been easy. When this

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organization was founded 48 years ago, the world's nations stood devastated by war or exhausted by its expense. There was little appetite for cooperative efforts among nations. Most people simply wanted to get on with their lives. But the far-sighted generations of leaders from the United States and elsewhere rallied the world. Their efforts built the institutions of post-war security and prosperity.

We are at a similar moment today.

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The momentum of the Cold War no longer propels us in our daily actions. And with dawning economic and political pressures upon almost every nation represented in this room, many of us are turning to focus greater attention and energy on our domestic needs and problems, and we must. But putting each of our economic houses in order cannot mean that we shut our windows to the world. The pursuit of self-renewal in many of the world's largest and most powerful economies -- in Europe, in Japan, in North America -- is absolutely crucial because, unless the great industrial nations can recapture their robust economic growth, the global economy will languish.

Yet, the industrial nations also need growth elsewhere in order to lift their own. Indeed, prosperity in each of our nations and regions also depends upon active and responsible engagement in a host of shared concerns. For example, a thriving and democratic Russia not only makes the world safer; it also can help to expand the world's economy. A strong GATT agreement will create millions of jobs worldwide. Peace in the Middle East, buttressed as it should be by the repeal of outdated U.N. resolutions, can help to unleash that region's great economic potential and calm a perpetual source of tension in global affairs. And the growing economic power of China, coupled with greater political openness, could bring enormous benefits to all of Asia and to the rest of the world.

We must help our publics to understand this distinction: Domestic renewal is an overdue tonic, but isolationism and protectionism are still poison. We must inspire people to look beyond their immediate fears toward a broader horizon. Let me start by being clear about where the United States stands.

The United States occupies a unique position in world affairs today. We recognize that, and we welcome it. Yet, with the Cold War over, I know many people ask whether the United States plans to retreat or remain active in the world and, if active, to what end. Many people are asking that in our own country as well. Let me answer that question as clearly and plainly as I can. The United States intends to remain engaged and to lead. We cannot solve every problem, but we must and will serve as a fulcrum for change and a pivot point for peace. In a new era of peril and opportunity, our overriding purpose must be to expand and strengthen the world's community of market-based

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democracies. During the Cold War, we sought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions. Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions.

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So our dream is of a day when the opinions and energies of every person in the world will be given full expression, in a world of striving democracies that cooperate with each other and live in peace. With this statement, I do not mean to announce some crusade to force our way of life and doing things on others or to replicate our institutions. But we now know clearly that, throughout the world, from Poland to Eritrea, from Guatemala to South Korea, there is an enormous yearning among people who wish to be the masters of their own economic and political lives. Where it matters most and where we can make the greatest difference, we will, therefore, patiently and firmly align ourselves with that yearning.

Today there are -- (audio break) -- democracy is simply not applicable to many cultures and that its recent expansion is an aberration, an accident, in history that will soon fade away. But I agree with President Roosevelt, who once said, "The democratic aspiration is no mere recent phase of human history; it is human history."

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We will work to strengthen the free-market democracies by revitalizing our economy here at home, by opening world trade through the GATT, the North American Free Trade Agreement and other accords, and by updating our shared institutions, asking with you and answering the hard questions about whether they are adequate to the present challenges. We will support the consolidation of market democracy where it is taking new root, as in the states of the former Soviet Union and all over Latin America. And we seek to foster the practices of good government that distribute the benefits of democracy and economic growth fairly to all people. We will work to reduce the threat from regimes that are hostile to democracy and to support liberalization of non-democratic states when they are willing to live in peace with the rest of us.

As a country that has over 150 different racial, ethnic and religious groups within our borders, our policy is and must be rooted in a profound respect for all the world's religions and cultures. But we must oppose everywhere extremism that produces terrorism and hate. And we must pursue our humanitarian goals of reducing suffering, fostering sustainable development, and improving the health and living conditions, particularly for our world's children.

On efforts from export controls to trade agreements to peacekeeping, we will often work in partnership with others and through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations. It is in our national interest to do so. But we must not hesitate to act unilaterally when there is a threat to our core interests or to those of our allies.

The United States believes that an expanding community of market democracies not only serves our own security interests, it also advances the goals enshrined in this body's charter and its universal declaration of human rights, for broadly-based prosperity is clearly the strongest form of preventive diplomacy, and the habits of democracy are the habits of peace. Democracy is rooted in compromise not conquest. It rewards tolerance not hatred. Democracies rarely wage war on one another. They make more reliable partners in trade, in diplomacy and in the stewardship of our global environment. And democracies, with the rule of law and respect for political, religious and cultural minorities are more responsive to their

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own people and to the protection of human rights.

But as we work toward this vision, we must confront the storm clouds that may overwhelm our work and darken the march toward

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freedom. If we do not stem the proliferation of the world's deadliest weapons, no democracy can feel secure. If we do not strengthen the capacity to resolve conflicts among and in nations, those conflicts will smother the birth of free institutions, threaten the development of entire regions and continue to take innocent lives. If we do not nurture our people and our planet through sustainable development, we will deepen conflict and waste the very wonders that make our efforts worth doing.

Let me talk more about what I believe we must do in each of these three categories: non-proliferation, conflict resolution and sustainable development.

One of our most urgent priorities must be attacking the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, whether they are nuclear, chemical or biological, and the ballistic missiles that can rain them down on populations hundreds of miles away. We know this is not an idle problem.

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All of us are still haunted by the pictures of Kurdish women and children cut down by poison gas. We saw Scud missiles dropped during the Gulf war that would have been far graver in their consequences if they had carried nuclear weapons. And we know that many nations still believe it is in their interests to develop weapons of mass destruction or to sell them or the necessary technologies to others for financial gain. More than a score of nations likely possess such weapons, and their number threatens to grow.

These weapons destabilize entire regions. They could turn a local conflict into a global human and environmental catastrophe. We simply have got to find ways to control these weapons and to reduce the number of states that possess them by supporting and strengthening the IAEA and by taking other necessary measures.

I have made non-proliferation one of our nation's highest priorities. We intend to weave it more deeply into the fabric of all of our relationships with the world's nations and institutions. We seek to build a world of increasing pressure for non-proliferation, but increasingly open trade and technology for those states that live by accepted international rules. Today, let me describe several new policies that our government will pursue to stem proliferation.

We will pursue new steps to control the materials for nuclear weapons. Growing global stockpiles of plutonium and highly enriched uranium are raising the danger of nuclear terrorism for all nations. We will press for an international agreement that would ban production of these materials for weapons forever.

As we reduce our nuclear stockpiles, the United States has also begun negotiations toward a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing. This summer I declared that to facilitate these negotiations our nation would suspend our testing if all other nuclear states would do the same. Today in the face of disturbing signs, I renew my call on the nuclear states to abide by that moratorium as we negotiate to stop nuclear testing for all time.

I am also proposing new efforts to fight the proliferation

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of biological and chemical weapons. Today only a handful of nations has ratified the chemical weapons convention. I call on all nations, including my own, to ratify this accord quickly so that it may enter into force by January 13th, 1995.

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We will also seek to strength the Biological Weapons Convention by making every nation's biological activities and facilities open to more international scrutiny. I am proposing as well new steps to thwart the proliferation of ballistic missiles. Recently, working with Russia, Argentina, Hungary and South Africa, we have made significant progress toward that goal. Now we will seek to strength the principles of the Missile Technology Control Regime by transforming it from an agreement on technology transfer among just 23 nations to a set of rules that can command universal adherence.

We will also reform our own system of export controls in the United States to reflect the realities of the post-Cold War world. Where we seek to enlist the support of our former adversaries in the battle against proliferation at the same time that we stop deadly technologies from falling into the wrong hands, we will work with our partners to remove outdated controls that unfairly burden legitimate commerce and unduly restrain growth and opportunity all over the world.

As we work to keep the world's most destructive weapons out of conflicts, we must also strength the international community's ability to address those conflicts themselves. For, as we all now know so painfully, the end of the Cold War did not bring us to the millennium of peace. Indeed, it simply removed the lid from many cauldrons of ethnic, religious and territorial animosity.

The philosopher Isaiah Berlin has said that a wounded nationalism is like a bent twig, forced down so severely that, when released, it lashes back with fury. The world today is thick with both bent and recoiling twigs of wounded communal identities. This surge of bitter conflicts has placed high demands on the United Nations' peacekeeping forces. Frequently, the blue helmets have worked wonders. In Namibia, El Salvador, the Golan Heights and elsewhere, U.N. peacekeepers have helped to stop fighting, restore civil authority and enable free elections.

In Bosnia, U.N. peacekeepers, against the danger and frustration of that continuing tragedy, have maintained a valiant humanitarian effort. And if the parties of that conflict take the hard steps needed to make a real peace, the

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international community, including the United States, must be ready to help in its effective implementation.

In Somalia, the United States and the United Nations have worked together to achieve a stunning humanitarian rescue, saving literally

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hundreds of thousands of lives and restoring the conditions of security to almost the entire country.

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U.N. peacekeepers from over two dozen nations remain in Somalia today, and some, including brave Americans, have lost their lives to ensure that we complete our mission and to ensure that anarchy and starvation do not return just as quickly as they were abolished. Many still criticize U.N. peacekeeping, but those who do should talk to the people of Cambodia where the U.N.'s operations have helped to turn the killing fields into fertile soil for reconciliation. Last May's elections in Cambodia marked a proud accomplishment for that war-weary nation and for the United Nations, and I am pleased to announce that the United States has recognized Cambodia's new government.

U.N. peacekeeping holds the promise to resolve many of this era's conflicts. The reason we have supported such missions is not, as some critics in the United States have charged, to subcontract American foreign policy, but to strengthen our security, protect our interests, and to share among nations the cost and effort of pursuing peace. Peacekeeping cannot be a substitute for our own national defense efforts, but it can strongly supplement them.

Today there is wide recognition that the U.N. peacekeeping ability has not kept pace with the rising responsibilities and challenges. Just six years ago, about 10,000 U.N. peacekeepers were stationed around the world. Today the U.N. has some 80,000 deployed in 17 operations on 4 continents. Yet, until recently, if a peacekeeping commander called in from across the globe when it was nighttime here in New York, there was no one in the peacekeeping office even to answer the call. When lives are on the line, we cannot let the reach of the U.N. exceed its grasp.

As the secretary-general and others have argued, if U.N. peacekeeping is to be a sound, security investment for our nation and for other U.N. members, it must adapt to new times.

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Together we must prepare U.N. peacekeeping for the 21st century. We need to begin by bringing the rigors of military and political analysis to every U.N. peace mission.

In recent weeks, in the Security Council, our nation has begun asking harder questions about proposals for new peacekeeping missions. Is there a real threat to international peace? Does the proposed mission have clear objectives? Can an end point be identified for those who will be asked to participate? How much will the mission cost? From now on, the United Nations should address these and other hard questions for every proposed mission before we vote and before the mission begins.

The United Nations simply cannot become engaged in every one of the world's conflicts. If the American people are to say yes to U.N. peacekeeping, the United Nations must know when to say no. The United Nations must also have the technical means to run a modern world class peacekeeping operation. We support the creation of a genuine U.N. peacekeeping headquarters with a planning staff, with access to timely intelligence, with a logistics unit that can be deployed on a moment's notice, and a modern operations center with global communications.

And the U.N.'s operations must not only be adequately funded but also fairly funded. Within the next few weeks, the United States will be current in our peacekeeping bill. I have worked hard with the Congress to get this done. I believe the United States should lead the way in being timely in its payments and I will work to continue to see that we pay our bills in full. But I am also committed to work with the United Nations to reduce our nation's assessment for these missions. The assessment system has not been changed since 1973, and everyone in our country knows that our percentage of the world's economic pie is not as great as it was then. Therefore, I believe our rate should be reduce to reflect the rise of other nations that can now bear more of the financial burden. That will make it easier for me as president to make sure we pay in a timely and full fashion.

Changes in the U.N.'s peacekeeping operations must be part of an even broader program of United Nations reform. I say that, again, not to criticize the United Nations but to help to

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improve it. As our Ambassador, Madeleine Albright, has suggested, the United States has always played a twin role to the U.N., first friend and first critic.

Today, corporations all around the world are finding ways to move from the industrial age to the information age, improving service,

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reducing bureaucracy, and cutting costs. Here in the United States, our Vice President Al Gore and I have launched an effort to literally reinvent how our government operates. We see this going on in other governments around the world. Now the time has come to reinvent the way the United Nations operates as well.

I applaud the initial steps the secretary-general has taken to reduce and to reform the United Nations bureaucracy. Now we must all do even more to root out waste. Before this General Assembly is over, let us establish a strong mandate for an office of inspector general so that it can attain a reputation for toughness, for integrity, for effectiveness.

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Let us build new confidence among our people that the United Nations is changing with the needs of our times.

Ultimately, the key for reforming the United Nations, as in reforming our own government, is to remember why we are here and whom we serve. It is well to recall that the first words of the U.N. Charter are not "We, the governments," but "We, the peoples of the United Nations." That means in every country the teachers, the workers, the farmers, the professionals, the fathers, the mothers, the children from the most remote village in the world to the largest metropolis, they are why we gather in this great hall. It is their futures that are at risk when we act or fail to act. And it is they who ultimately pay our bills.

As we dream new dreams in this age when miracles now seem possible, let us focus on the lives of those people, and especially on the children who will inherit this world. Let us work with a new urgency and imagine what kind of world we could create for them over the coming generation. Let us work with new energy to protect the world's people from torture and repression. As Secretary of State Christopher stressed at the recent Vienna conference, human rights are not something conditional, bounded by culture, but rather something universal granted by God. This general assembly should create at long last a high commissioner for human rights. I hope you will do it soon and with vigor and energy and conviction. (Applause.)

Let us also work far more ambitiously to fulfill our obligations as custodians of this planet not only to improve the quality of life for our citizens and the quality of our air and water and the earth itself, but also because the roots of conflict are so often entangled with the roots of environmental neglect and the calamities of famine and disease.

During the course of our campaign in the United States last year Vice President Gore and I promised the American people major changes in our nation's policy toward the global environment. Those were promises to keep, and today the United States is doing so.

Today we are working with other nations to build on the promising work of the U.N.'s Commission of Sustainable Development. We are working to make sure that all nations meet



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their commitments under the Global Climate convention. We are seeking to complete negotiations on an accord to prevent the world's deserts from further expansion. And we seek to strengthen the World Health Organization's efforts to

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combat the plague of AIDS, which is not killing millions, but also exhausting the resources of nations that can least afford it. And let us make a new commitment to the world's children.

It is tragic enough that one and a half million children died as a result of wars over the past decade. But it is far more unforgivable that during that same period, 40 million children died from diseases completely preventable with simple vaccines or medicines. Every day -- this day, as we meet here -- over 30,000 of the world's children will die of malnutrition and disease.

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Our UNICEF director, Jim Grant, has reminded me that each of those children had a name and a nationality, a family, a personality, and a potential. We are compelled to do better by the world's children. Just as our own nation has launched new reforms to ensure that every child has adequate health care, we must do more to get basic vaccines and other treatments for curable diseases to children all over the world. It's the best investment we'll ever make. We can find new ways to ensure that every child grows up with clean, drinkable water, that most precious commodity of life itself. And the U.N. can work even harder to ensure that each child has at least a full primary education, and I mean that opportunity for girls as well as boys.

And to ensure a healthier and more abundant world, we simply must slow the world's explosive growth in population. We cannot afford to see the human race double by the middle of the next century. Our nation has at last renewed its commitment to work with the United Nations to expand the availability of the world's family planning education and services. We must ensure that there is a place at the table for every one of our world's children. And we can do it.

At the birth of this organization 48 years ago, another time of both victory and danger, a generation of gifted leaders from many nations stepped forward to organize the world's efforts on behalf of security and prosperity. One American leader during that period said this: "It is time we steered by the stars rather than by the light of each passing ship." His generation picked peace, human dignity and freedom. Those are good stars. They should remain the highest in our own firmament.

Now history has granted to us a moment of even greater opportunity. When old dangers are ebbing and old walls are crumbling, future generations will judge us, every one of us, above all by what we make of this magic moment. Let us resolve that we will dream larger, that we will work harder, so that they can conclude that we did not merely turn walls to rubble, but instead laid the foundations for great things to come. Let us ensure that the tide of freedom and democracy is not pushed back by the fierce winds of ethnic hatreds. Let us ensure that the world's most dangerous weapons are safely reduced and denied

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to dangerous hands. Let us ensure that the world we pass to our children is healthier, safer, and more abundant than the one we inhabit today.

I believe, I know that together we can extend this moment of miracles into an age of great works and new wonders.

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Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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