



**'Global Governance at the beginning of the 21st
century: what is the role of the United
Nations?'**

Address given by

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Mr. Minister,
Madam Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a *great pleasure* to be with you today to address a topic which has been at the core of the 65th session of the General Assembly: the role of the United Nations in global governance. I appreciate particularly to deliver what is probably one of my last speeches on this topic in my capacity of President of the General Assembly here in Chile: Chile has been, indeed, instrumental in passing the *resolution* on the United Nations and global governance, which was sponsored by about 100 Member States and adopted unanimously in December 2010, and which will allow the work of the General Assembly on the topic to continue beyond the 65th session. I thank you, Madam, Mr. Minister, for organizing this seminar and I thank you warmly for inviting me.

It seems to me that time is ripe to speak about global governance, for at least three reasons.

First, in the globalized world of the early 21st century, *problems cross borders* without asking for passports. It is no longer possible to ignore what is happening abroad. The economic and financial crisis, which started in the United States and then spread to the entire world, is a striking example of the speed with which problems internationalize themselves. Another tragic example is the earthquake and the tsunami that hit Japan and the related risk of a nuclear catastrophe. This led many countries worldwide to reconsider their energy policy and the use of nuclear plants, but it also showed the need to address the issue

of nuclear safety collectively. The UN Secretary-General thus decided to convene a meeting on the issue during the next General Debate of the General Assembly on 22 September in New York.

There are many other pressing global challenges, like poverty reduction, environmental issues, migration, pandemics, and global terrorism. These challenges have to be addressed through *global decision-making and global action*; that is: through global governance.

Let me clarify that global governance is not the same thing as global government. We are not heading towards establishing a world government; global governance is a way of organizing decision-making in a Westphalian world of sovereign entities with their national parliaments. Furthermore, global governance should be based on the principle of subsidiarity. Problems that can be addressed at the local, national or regional level should be addressed at these levels. This is a rule that has been long applied in federalist states.

Second, a *shift in the world demographic, political and economic balance* is taking place. By 2050, the world population is projected to reach 9.1 billion, up from 6.4 billion today, with most of the increase occurring in developing countries. New markets are emerging. This has been made even clearer by the economic and financial crisis of 2008/2009 and the recovery that is now taking place. China, Brazil and the emerging markets in general are faring much better than more mature economies. Suffice it to mention here the rather disappointing economic data recently released for the United States and the debt crisis now prevailing in the euro zone. A significant structural change is taking place. Multilateral corporations from the

BRICS countries are increasingly competing with, as well as acquiring, companies from OECD countries. South-South trade and investment flows, as well as South-South cooperation are growing at an impressive pace. The global governance system has to better take into account these trends.

Third, the *global governance landscape* is becoming *more fragmented and more complex*. Traditional multilateral institutions, like the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions, are increasingly criticized for not being efficient and representative enough.

As a response, *new actors*, like the G20 and other ad hoc informal groups have emerged. The economic and financial crisis has highlighted the importance of a *rapid and coordinated response*, which the G20 has – at least in the immediate aftermath of the crisis - effectively delivered.

There is a risk for the UN to be marginalized. Suffice it to recall here that when Heads of State and government of the G20 met in Pittsburgh, on 24-25 September 2009, to work out a collective response to the economic and financial crisis, the General Debate was still going on at the United Nations in New York!

Yet, if we have to acknowledge that these smaller groupings can indeed act in an efficient manner, their inclusiveness and legitimacy on the other hand is questionable. We have to find the best possible articulation *between expertise, leadership and legitimacy*, and all this has to be coherent.

I am convinced that the United Nations and its General Assembly have a *central role to play* to capture the complexity of this new world and to shape a global governance structure that is efficient, open and representative.

Among the actors of global governance at the beginning of the 21st century, the United Nations can indeed boast unique *comparative advantages*. First and foremost, in spite of all the criticisms, the United Nations has served us well since its creation. The organization undoubtedly contributed to making the world a better place.

'Most people today are healthier, they live longer, and are more educated and have more access to goods and services. Even in countries facing adverse economic conditions, people's health and education have greatly improved.' This is the main conclusion from the latest Human Development Report. Furthermore, in 2008, the number of death due to conflicts between states was the lowest ever.

The contribution of the United Nations to *strengthening international law*, and thus to pacifying the world is undeniable. The adoption of the *Universal declaration of human rights* in 1948 is a landmark decision, which sowed the seeds for concretely advancing human rights worldwide. In 2005, the adoption of a resolution including the *'responsibility to protect'* marks another significant step. The potential of this instrument to protect people and fight impunity for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing still need to be fully operationalized and lessons from implementation have to be drawn. In this regard, the adoption of the resolution 1973 on Libya by the UN Security Council marks a clear recognition by the international

community of the responsibility to protect.

R2P is one of the *seminal ideas and concepts* that the United Nations has contributed to developing and promoting over the last 60 years and which have the potential to change the world.

The value of the United Nations rests on other essential assets such as its *unique legitimacy*. The UN is a Charter-based organization, with purposes and principles, membership and organs, and a budget that are clearly defined. The UN offers a stable institutional framework to Member States. Any matters within the scope of the Charter may be discussed by the General Assembly. This contrasts with the 'summit-based' and 'issue-based' nature of the G groupings, and the discretion and arbitrariness that drive their membership. For instance, what are the criteria for selecting the non-G20 countries invited by the Presidency to participate in the G20 Summit?

With its 193 Member States, the UN General Assembly is a near-universal body and reflects the full diversity of situations and interests at stake. It is there to promote the rights of every woman and man on our planet. With its system of one country, one vote, it ensures that even the smallest voices are heard. As an operational entity, the United Nations system, with its various specialized agencies, programs and bodies, has the expertise and the presence in the field to be the central element of the global governance landscape.

I am satisfied that the topic of global governance, which I proposed for the *general debate* of the General Assembly last September in New York, found significant resonance in the statements of the Member

States. The adoption by consensus by the General Assembly, in December, of the *resolution* that I have mentioned already as well as this seminar are clear expressions of the interest for this topic.

We must find concrete ways to ensure that the UN fulfils its central role in the global governance system and thus avoid being marginalised. There are several aspects to consider:

First, a strong United Nations requires a *decisive effort* to revitalize the General Assembly, to reform the Security Council and review the work of the Human Rights Council.

In order to make *progress* on these issues during the 65th session of the General Assembly, I designated or reconfirmed facilitators to lead the ad hoc group on revitalization of the General Assembly as well as facilitators to lead the negotiation processes on the reform of the Security Council and the review of the Human Rights Council.

Yet, the pace of progress and the success of these reforms do not depend on me. The Member States are in the driver's seat, and while I can create the conditions conducive to progress, it is up to the Member States to find the common ground and forge the consensus. Therefore, I am particularly satisfied that the review of the work of the Human Rights Council was successfully completed with its formal adoption by the General Assembly on 17 June.

A second aspect is to *strengthen the economic bodies* of the United Nations, I think here in particular of the ECOSOC. The adoption of resolution 61/16 on strengthening of the ECOSOC is a first step. This

year, with the able support of Ambassador Errázuriz, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations, I conducted a review of the implementation of that resolution, and made a number of recommendations. I already encouraged all Member States to consider them and to take the action needed to implement them. I also addressed the topic of the reform of the ECOSOC during the opening session of the High-level segment of the ECOSOC in Geneva on 4 July. It seems to me indeed, that deeper reforms of the ECOSOC are needed to prevent its marginalisation by the G20. The ECOSOC held its substantive session during the whole month of July and did not address the current economic turmoil on the international financial markets. It is necessary to reset priorities and refocus the mandate of the ECOSOC, which currently addresses too many issues, ranging from cultural and educational cooperation to human rights. When addressing education for instance – as was the case during the substantive session this year – the ECOSOC should essentially focus on economic aspects, such as how to ensure that skills match with the requirements of the labour market. It is important that, in shaping multilateral diplomacy, Ministries of Foreign Affairs interact with *experts from finance, economy and other sector Ministries* to bring more technical substance into the debates. The annual meeting of the Bretton Woods Institutions with the ECOSOC is an instrument for interaction and consultation whose potential has to be better exploited.

Third, as I have stressed, new actors have emerged, playing a useful role. We thus have to find the *appropriate mechanisms for communication, consultation, and cooperation* between the UN and these other actors of global governance. These mechanisms will have to encompass non governmental actors from the private sector, civil

society and academic bodies and think tanks, which are playing an increasing role in shaping today's global world.

I organized, as a first concrete step, informal discussions of the General Assembly before and after the G20 Summit in Seoul to give all Member States the opportunity to express their views, regardless whether or not they were invited to participate in the Seoul meeting. I am pleased that the building of bridges between the United Nations and the G20 has been continuing this year with the French Presidency of the Group. In February, the French Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fishing, Mr. Bruno Le Maire, participated in an informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly to inform the Member States about the priorities of the French Presidency for the G20 on agricultural matters. Similarly, in June, the French Minister of Labour, Mr. Xavier Bertrand, briefed the General Assembly on the G20 priorities on social protection and employment. Since the G20 Summit in Cannes is still several weeks ahead of us, there will be other opportunities for substantive interactions between the United Nations and the G20 in order for all the Member States to give their views on the agenda of the Summit. Mr. Le Maire will be in New York on 29 August for a debriefing on the G20 Agriculture Ministerial meeting that took place in June. In order to raise the accountability and legitimacy of the G20, it will be important to have a post G20 Summit meeting based on the model of the one we had after the Seoul Summit. It is encouraging that Mexico, who will be the next G20 President, already announced its willingness to continue building bridges.

The experience so far with these informal debates showed that, for the discussion to be meaningful, it is key to strengthen the expertise of

delegates on economic issues in particular. Ultimately, a more formal mechanism is needed, to ensure that the outcomes of these meetings are fully integrated into the work of the G20. This could be done by giving the Secretary-General a more formal mandate when participating in the G20 meetings or by strengthening the role of the Chair of the ECOSOC.

This being said, it seems to me that the G20 is at a *critical juncture*. The Seoul Summit last November delivered *concrete outcomes in some areas*, like the modernization of the IMF and the strengthening of the financial regulatory framework. This is welcome. But let me repeat that to *enjoy full legitimacy*, these decisions have to be ultimately *endorsed by the appropriate international bodies*.

Yet, on other important issues raised in Seoul, less tangible results have been achieved. The outcomes of the G20 Ministerial meetings that took place so far this year, in particular the G20 meetings of the Finance ministers in Paris and in Washington, did not produce major breakthroughs on the priorities of the French Presidency. Similarly, the G20 has been silent on the recent discussions on the US debt ceiling and on the euro zone debt crisis – which have far reaching consequences for the world economy. This unveils the crude fact that the resolve to act collectively is very much depending on how risks are perceived. Even smaller groups of countries reach *limits in forging the consensus* when the threat of an imminent crisis appears to be diminishing. Divergences and tensions tend to be more visible and coordinated decision-making becomes more difficult.

By contrast, the Nagoya Summit on biodiversity and the Cancun Summit on climate change are two recent positive achievements for the *UN multilateral diplomacy*, which show that the way of conducting consultations and negotiations at each stage of the process is also key for success. My hope is that the outcome of the upcoming COP17 in Durban will confirm this trend.

The *resolute handling* of the suspension of Libya's rights of membership in the Human Rights Council by the Council and the General Assembly is another example, which proves that even though the UN machinery might be burdensome and rusty, when there is political willingness to make the best use of the instrument, breakthroughs are possible.

The G8 and G20 summit diplomacy is probably not the *final state* of the governance system for the 21st century. What seems to be sure is that this system will encompass the three poles – expertise, leadership and legitimacy. But the entities belonging to each pole and the relations between these poles are elements still to be worked out, as well as how to best ensure coherence in decision-making.

As I said, I am convinced that legitimacy mainly rests with the United Nations and its General Assembly. Yet, what about the role of the Security Council as regards legitimacy and leadership? What about the ECOSOC?

What about leadership and the G20? Will the G20 evolve beyond being the 'premier forum for international economic cooperation' as self-proclaimed at the September 2009 Pittsburgh Summit and succeed in

expanding its agenda to development and governance issues? Will it evolve from being a 'crisis committee' to assert itself as a 'leading committee'? The G20 has indeed strong assets for global leadership usefully complementing and articulating with the United Nations. The G20 convenes at the level of heads of states, thus enabling a cross-sector view of problems - an important feature to capture the true nature of today's global challenges and to increase coherence in policy-making.

The G20 is in a position to provide the necessary stimulus to trigger action in times of crisis. But it does not have the legitimate traction to overcome the competition among *specialized institutions*, such as the World Bank, the IMF, the ILO, the UNCTAD, UNDP if one just mentions some of the international entities addressing economic and social issues, competition which may at times hamper decision-making. Only the General Assembly, with its broad mandate, has the means to supervise the work of the specialised agencies in order to foster coherence.

As to these specialized institutions, where solutions have to be worked out and implemented, to what extent are their governance arrangements representative? What about the overlaps and the gaps between their mandates at the sector level?

Many questions are still open. To reflect on the architecture and the functioning of the global governance system, I convened an *informal debate* at the General Assembly on 28 June in New York. We adopted a visionary stance, looking at what is needed to ensure the relevance of the UN at the horizon of 2025. I believe that we had a good

discussion, which will usefully feed into the report on global governance that the Secretary-general is preparing for the 66th session.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today and tomorrow, you will have the opportunity to further address the many questions that I have just mentioned about global governance. This is an important occasion to address these issues from the perspective of the Western Hemisphere and to consider the contribution of the region to global governance. I thank you for your attention and I look forward to hearing your views on this very topical issue.