

**Address by Alicia Bárcena,
Executive Secretary of ECLAC, at
the sixty-fourth anniversary of
the United Nations,
Santiago, 23 October 2009**

Mariano Fernández, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile; Enrique Ganuza, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Chile; distinguished ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps; colleagues and members of the United Nations country staff in Chile; Eduardo Chapparro, President of the ECLAC Staff Council; dear colleagues and friends:

First, I would like to welcome you to ECLAC, the largest United Nations body in the region, to celebrate the sixty-fourth anniversary of our Organization.

I extend a special greeting to those who work in Chile as representatives of the entire United Nations system, as well as those who serve in other latitudes, those who, wearing blue emblems, travel across cities and to distant villages bearing food, treating illnesses, vaccinating children, protecting the elderly, and spreading hope for a better life, those who, far from the safety of our offices, place their lives at risk for the values this Organization represents. Today, we remember each of these and pay them special tribute.

As is our tradition in this house, we take a pause from our activities today and gather to celebrate another anniversary of the Charter of the United Nations and to renew our commitment to the preservation of peace, human rights, international justice, social development, environmental protection, gender equality, and the ongoing improvement of quality of life for all people, within a context of democracy and freedom.

I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile, Mariano Fernández, for accepting our invitation to participate in this celebration and for his kindness in sharing his reflections with us.

My friends

This anniversary finds the United Nations at a turning point for humankind. The world is managing with some degree of success to negotiate the tough economic conditions brought on by the financial crisis. However, lurking beneath the earliest signs of recovery is the spectre of what could prove to be the deepest levels of unemployment in history. In another arena, within just a few weeks, representatives of all Governments are expected to agree on a course of action for responding to the single greatest challenge of our generation: climate change.

These two situations have motivated the international community to lay aside the temptation to blaze individualist trails and to renew its commitment to cooperation and multilateralism. These winds of change are being felt in the United Nations and in other international bodies as well. There is a clear recognition that only by working together, under equal conditions, will we find lasting solutions.

Today we can state with conviction that multilateralism faces an unprecedented opportunity, as was borne out in statements by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Barack Obama, Hu Jintao, Felipe Calderón, Michelle Bachelet, Nicolas Sarkozy, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and others. During the current session of the General Assembly, these heads of state emphasized that the United Nations Organization is the largest forum for debating the serious problems that affect humanity, stressing that modern multilateralism must renew its commitment to the tapestry of international agreements on rights and duties based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. This will provide legal and political certainties and will allow the United Nations to resume its main objective, of building a fair and balanced international order with clear rules that protect the weakest and in which middle-income countries and emerging economies carry some weight.

The Organization of the United Nations has extended great effort to meet this objective and to this end it has established rights and duties designed for implementation at both national and international levels. The history of the Organization has been one of designing and implementing international rules that today allow for prosecution of crimes against humanity, for joint actions in response to global challenges that affect natural resources, and for protecting those who are excluded from our societies.

With the changes wrought by globalization in contemporary life, the destinies of all human beings have become fully interwoven. All of our societies have thrown open their windows at the same time, and it is no longer possible to shut them. Through these windows flow breezes that are both cold and warm, news that is both good and bad, and opportunities and failures. As Zygmunt Bauman said, “A society that is open is a society exposed to the blows of fate.”

No longer are there countries capable of resolving, on their own, the whole or even greater part of their local problems. We need each other, be that in order to uphold the values of our currencies, to deal with organized crime, to control immigration, to meet our energy needs, or to care for the environment. The truth is that we need each other on a daily basis.

To this end, in today’s world multilateralism serves as both method and principle, process and end when it comes to preserving gains and advances that have a civilizing effect and facing the challenges of a future that is less certain than ever.

The international community understands with increasing clarity that multilateralism draws on, and renews itself through, faithfulness to democratic values, human rights, development with equity, gender equality, intercultural dialogue, disarmament, and especially the abolition of nuclear weapons.

So, what sort of United Nations does this call for?

The United Nations Organization is not, nor has it ever been, a body impervious to change. One of its earliest innovations or reforms came as a result of the initiative of the outstanding Chilean diplomat, Hernán Santa Cruz, who paved the way for the creation of ECLAC. Countless other innovations have followed – new alliances and ways of doing things, and loftier ambitions.

In recent years, several initiatives have stimulated organizational reform in order to better harmonize the whole range of activities of the United Nations system in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance, and the environment.

The most recent of these initiatives was resolution 63/311, adopted by the General Assembly on 11 September 2009, and which provides a significant boost towards fulfilling the international agenda on equality between men and women, by underscoring the need for greater coordination and commitment by member States and by the United Nations system. This resolution establishes what is now referred to as the new gender architecture of the United Nations.

Nearly 15 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, this is a necessary step. The new gender architecture sends out a loud and clear message in response to the fact that, because of discrimination, women are still treated as a virtual minority, despite making up one half of the population. But it also sends a message about enhanced system-wide coherence in the work of the United Nations.

This call for joint engagement has resonated with the regional commissions. An example of this is the launch in the region of the Secretary General's campaign, "*UNite to end violence against women*", which will take place on 25 November, in Guatemala, under the joint leadership of President Colom and all bodies and organizations of the system. This initiative demonstrates the will that exists to bring an end to impunity, to improve access to justice for all men and women, and to ensure that women are fully empowered to exercise their human rights.

To this list of recent innovations and reforms we must add the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission, in 2005. Under the leadership of Chile's Ambassador Heraldo Muñoz, who has presided brilliantly over the Commission, the United Nations is boldly making a commitment that extends beyond its contributions to cease-fires, to signing peace accords, and to keeping order, and acknowledges the need to attack the root causes of conflicts so that affected countries might avoid exposure to relapse.

In September we, along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile, held a successful seminar that gave us a chance to take a close look at the Commission's performance, including its advances and challenges.

Another component of the Organization's new architecture for reinforcing the ideal of multilateralism as it applies to the advocacy and protection of human rights in the world is the Human Rights Council, created by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006 to replace the former Commission. The primary objective of the Council is to address situations of human rights violations and make recommendations about them. In other words, it represents the United Nations in action. This Human Rights Council employs novel instruments, including the new universal periodic review mechanism, which will study the human rights situations in all 192 member States of the United Nations, once every four years. The central feature of this mechanism is that it is designed to ensure equitable treatment for all countries.

One of the pending tasks the United Nations has yet to tackle in its reform process is the much-needed reform of the Security Council. Many proposals have been put forth over the years – in fact, the first discussions of the issue date back to 1979 – and the possibilities are limited

only by whatever the political geometry will allow. Nevertheless, the heart of the issue is this: today, as it did at the time of its inception, the Security Council should reflect the realities of the geopolitical world. In order to enhance its bid for multilateralism, the Security Council must be renovated to become more inclusive, democratic, and transparent. It should also enjoy an undisputed legitimacy that responds to new political realities.

There is no question that the experiences gleaned by the members of the Group of Twenty (G-20) and the consensuses they reached while scrutinizing a set of measures to address the economic crisis and define the foundational elements of a new international financial architecture will help in this regard. Furthermore, the formal commitment undertaken by the G-20 leaders who met in Pittsburgh, United States, on 25 September 2009 – to transfer at least 5% of the voting rights of over-represented countries to under-represented countries – could mean a significant step forward in building this sense of international commonality.

In discussions about the new international financial architecture, some initiatives have been devised that would expand the functions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

It is general knowledge that, in the past, the global development agenda has been run by the collective will of a small number of developed countries whose weight and influence in international bodies is overwhelming. One of the future imperatives of global governance will be the creation of broader and more inclusive bodies for hammering out the global development agenda. One proposal, which we rather like, calls for expanding the current functions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The reasoning is that this forum could function at a level equivalent to that of the General Assembly or the Security Council. Its functions could include analysing and evaluating progress at the economic, social, and environmental levels; promoting economic development; harmonizing the policy objectives of the major international bodies; and fostering consensus among Governments of the world. This Council should include representation from all regions and from the world's largest economies. It would also be good to encourage the participation of other major multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Multilateralism is facing a new opportunity. It is up to us to turn this new atmosphere of cooperation and respect into an effective tool for confronting the urgent problems that press upon humankind. This is a tremendous challenge for our generation to face.

We are the peoples of the United Nations, those who, once again, reaffirm our “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small,” engaged together in building a future for all.

We must keep the Millennium Development Goals in view. Meeting these Goals is not only a supreme test of our credibility in living up to international commitments, but also an essential motivation for pursuing greater ambitions at this time of changing development paradigms. We must not fail in reaching them and constantly revising them, but with the same conviction I affirm that we must not stop at these Goals. They are just a starting point, a minimum level of the solidarity to which all inhabitants of the planet should aspire and which societies must be capable of achieving.

Minister Fernández

Paul Kennedy was right when he defined the United Nations as “the parliament of humanity.”

In that assembly, Chile’s voice is cherished and respected. When I opened this address, I expressed my gratitude for the presence of Chile’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mariano Fernández, in this celebratory event. Before turning the floor over to him, I would like to express, Mr. Minister, on behalf of the United Nations, the gratitude we feel towards your country, for the support it has given both to the United Nations and to ECLAC.

I would also ask that you pass on to Her Excellency President Michelle Bachelet our deep appreciation and respect for her and her commitment to the United Nations. I ask you to convey to her that we fully agree with her recent statement at the General Assembly:

“...Multilateral dialogue must once again be placed at the centre of international policy, while unilateralism must be relegated to the past. Military or economic might cannot be the norm in international relations. Institutions and the rule of law must prevail, since this is the only way to ensure peace and development... We have the ability to correct the course of our future.”

Let’s get to work. Thank you very much.