



INTERACTION COUNCIL

Established in 1983

**Speech at the Opening Ceremony of
the 22nd Annual Meeting of the InterAction Council**

“A Global Tour d’Horizon”

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**21 July 2004
Salzburg, Austria**

Ladies and gentlemen, my friends,

It is a great honour for me to address you at the opening of this important meeting here today. I am keenly aware of the challenge this represents, following as it does the speeches by Helmut Schmidt in Berlin in 2002 and by Malcolm Fraser in Moscow in 2003.

I was Prime Minister of Sweden in the dramatic years between 1986 and 1991. During this period, decisive changes took place around the world, changes that we had previously thought inconceivable: the collapse of communism, the end of the Cold War, the fall of apartheid, the liberation of the Baltic States, the break-up of the Soviet Union. All this within the space of just a few years.

The world and the power structures that had been familiar to me throughout my political life had suddenly altered profoundly. I also remember very clearly the hopes this awakened in us all: the world would now disarm, nuclear weapons would be phased out, and resources would be freed up for the task of combating world poverty and promoting development. There was talk of the “peace dividend” that would boost countries’ foreign aid contributions. We hoped it would now become possible to strengthen the UN and respect for both international law and human rights. Throughout the Cold War, the UN Security Council had been deadlocked and virtually powerless due to the ideological antagonism between the two blocs, and to the right of veto. Now at last the UN was in a position to fulfil its primary task of averting conflicts and helping to bring about a more peaceful world.

We were not, of course, so naive as to imagine that global peace was at hand, or so ideologically innocent as to accept the Hegelian theories of Francis Fukayama about the end of history – that we were witnessing the triumph of a single ideology, informed by laissez-faire capitalism. On the contrary, that era was rich in ideological conflict between right and left.

Nevertheless, we foresaw the possibility of democratic progress in large parts of the world. We foresaw international policies based on the common values expressed both in the United Nations Charter and in the various conventions on human rights, establishing normative systems that until then had only had a marginal impact on global development. We hoped there would now be greater scope for reform policies dictated by common sense. These kinds of ideas and reforms were presented in a 1995 report entitled “Our Global Neighbourhood”, compiled by the Commission on Global Governance. I had the pleasure of co-chairing this commission with Sir Shridath Ramphal, former Secretary General of the British Commonwealth.

It is not my intention here today to provide a detailed summary or balance-sheet setting our aspirations in relation to what has actually occurred since. No-one can deny that great progress has been made, for instance in Europe, where East and West have joined in a peaceful union for the first time in their history. The First of May 2004, when the EU 15 became the EU 25, was indeed an historic day. As was the Tenth of May 1994, ten years earlier, when Nelson Mandela was solemnly proclaimed the first president of a democratic South Africa and through the force of his personality gave hope and assurance to an entire world.

Or take Latin America, now free from military dictatorships, even if democracy and human rights are under severe pressure in some places, such as Columbia, Guatemala and Cuba. Or consider the remarkable speed of economic growth in China and India, which raises hopes for the future. The recent election also testifies to the strength and stability of Indian democracy. In China, there are signs of a more open public dialogue, although the government’s record in the human rights field is still very poor.

So great strides have indeed been made over the past decade. However, we also remember the great defeats and disasters that have occurred and we feel shame and anger at our failure to prevent them. I am referring in particular to the wars and killings in the Balkans and the genocide in Rwanda. And today, we see the huge divides that separate the world, the wealth of the few and the poverty of the many, the difficult plight of many African countries, and the widening gaps that are afflicting the rich countries as well.

The Millennium Development Goals, committing us to eradicate extreme poverty in the world by the year 2015, have been overshadowed by international terrorism and new, devastating wars. In particular, we see how the very concept of joint international action and collaboration, along with respect for human rights and the principle of the equal worth of all under international law, are being deliberately undermined and called into question.

What is particularly depressing to see is the return of destructive phantoms from the past century: aggressive nationalism, religious fanaticism, xenophobia and racism, the glorification of war and militarism. Such currents are now sweeping across the globe, fuelled and exploited by populist politicians or deadly terrorists and nourished by national humiliation and economic desperation.

Nationalistic and political objectives are being clothed in the garb of religion in all-too-familiar ways, and we know from the past what destructive forces this can unleash. The dividing line between religion and politics, established through enormous effort and at great human cost, is being subjected to deliberate and sometimes successful attack.

Al-Qaeda terrorism is a terrible, lethal manifestation of these currents and attitudes. It cannot be viewed simply in terms of criminal religious fanaticism. It has political goals, primarily the overthrow of the regimes in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, and the establishment of Islamist theocracies. It would appear to have wider-ranging objectives as well: to overthrow the prevailing global economic order and weaken the United States in particular.

There is much to be said, and also to be learnt from the past, about how this terrorism arose and developed. I would like today to limit myself to one observation: We all know that bin Laden developed his power base in the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, in which he was supported and championed by the United States, chiefly via Pakistan. Once again, we see how dangerous it is to base one's actions on the old adage of "the enemies of my enemies are my friends".

The list of abhorrent regimes that supported the West directly or indirectly during the Cold War is a veritable rogues' gallery that even includes Pol Pot, one of the most infamous mass murderers of all time. The list also includes Saddam Hussein, who, despite his brutality and his extermination of tens of thousands of Kurds, was long supported as a counterweight to Iran, and who was supplied with weapons by eager arms dealers from the Soviet Union and Europe. Yesterday's valuable friends, however, have turned into today's monsters.

Events like these ought to bring an end to such dangerous policies once and for all. A better, more peaceful world cannot be achieved with the aid of dictatorships and criminals, even though they may be useful in the short term. Democracies must live up to their own ideals in the policies they pursue. It is when you betray these ideals that you invite fresh disaster.

We must realise that terrorism generates counter-forces which are also dangerous and which in actual fact may encourage the terrorists and provide them with a new recruitment base. I particularly have in mind the powerful nationalistic tendencies that characterise the United States today, strongly encouraged by the Bush administration. Here, too, nationalism and religion are interwoven. Here, too, religious fundamentalists exercise no little influence. And here, too, God is invoked in support of war.

This is the kind of nationalism of which we have such bitter experience in Europe, and which the United States has until now largely been spared. It is very different from ordinary patriotism or pride in one's country. It derives from a mixture of idealised images of the past, bitterness or contempt towards an unsympathetic world, and an aggressive self-regard and pride in one's own armed might, which indeed is unparalleled. It is also sustained by an understandable fear of new terrorist attacks, a fear that is constantly perpetuated by new warnings.

The war on terrorism declared by President Bush, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the new American strategy according to which the United States is entitled to take preventive action against any country or regime that it considers a threat to its own interests, all feed on this nationalism while at the same time lending it fresh impetus. Or as one of John F Kennedy's leading advisers,

Theodore Sorensen, put it in a speech a year or so ago: “Too many Americans today are becoming too fond of war”.

In the Security Council, the United States cited the threat of WMDs -weapons of mass destruction - as the principal reason for going to war with Iraq. This had nothing to do with intervention. Nor had diplomatic efforts been exhausted by the time the decision was taken to invade. In fact, it was patently obvious that the Bush Administration had already decided to wage war against Iraq as a demonstration of the doctrine of preventive action, which is very different from humanitarian intervention.

The concept of Humanitarian Intervention evolved in the 1990s against a background of civil war and atrocities in a number of regions. In all those cases, large sections of the population were oppressed, tortured or murdered.

These experiences led Secretary General Kofi Annan and his two predecessors to suggest that the international community has the right to intervene - and should intervene - to protect vulnerable groups in cases of immediate, severe and large-scale abuses of human rights or genocide. To employ military force in extreme situations of abuse, they argued, is not necessarily inconsistent with the spirit of the UN Charter and international law if such an intervention has the backing of a Security Council resolution.

The American war on terrorism, and the Iraq war in particular, have given the terrorists new supporters rather than stemming the tide. The situation has not of course been improved by Guantanamo and the fact that the US army and the CIA have been guilty of torturing prisoners in both Afghanistan and Iraq, apparently with the approval of the political administration. The solidarity and compassion bestowed on the United States following the attacks of 11 September has diminished considerably. This is true in general, but particularly in the Arab world and in other Islamic countries: despite protestations to the contrary, the war on terrorism has increasingly appeared to target Islam, and the terrorists have taken advantage of this fact. This adversely affects not only the United States but also the values that the US and many other countries seek to communicate: democracy, freedom and respect for human rights.

The innate strength of the American democratic system, however, was demonstrated recently when the Supreme Court ruled that the terror suspects held in Guantanamo had the right to challenge their detention in court.

Despite all these developments, the American-led war on terrorism has spread worldwide and gained a degree of acceptance. But it leads our thinking and our practice in the wrong direction. I am not denying that military force may sometimes be justified. But it must be exercised in proportion to the threat, and the likely consequences must be considered with the utmost care. This is precisely what failed to happen in the case of Iraq, and perhaps in the case of Afghanistan as well, even if this war could be explained and legitimised in terms of a defence against aggression. The Iraq war was a disaster as it not only violated international law but was also a very unwise political move.

International terrorism must of course be fought by judicial and if necessary by military means, but the principal aim should be to isolate and marginalise terrorist groups by any means possible. The terrorists themselves are probably beyond the reach of dialogue or even deterrence, but we must make it harder for them to recruit and to enhance their reputation in general in militant Islamic circles. It is now a case of doing whatever we can to bring an end to the violence in Iraq and Afghanistan and to encourage moves towards peace. But the outlook is not very bright.

An important part of the effort to isolate the terrorists and promote peace and progress in the Arab world is the introduction of economic, social and political reform. The problems facing Arab societies have been described in depth in the UNDP's Arab Human Development Reports. These show, for instance, that progress is being hampered by both structural and cultural problems. The oppression of women practised in these countries represents an enormous squandering of human resources. The American Greater Middle East initiative looks interesting but the United States lacks credibility. Nor does the European Union have the requisite credibility.

The best course would be for the programmes currently being discussed both inside and outside the Arab world to be strengthened by means of collaboration between the countries concerned and the United Nations, primarily the UNDP.

Respect for human rights must also inform the struggle against terrorism. It is, after all, these rights that we are defending and that the terrorists are threatening. The hunt for terrorists has led to clear violations of civil liberties and human rights, not only in the United States but in many other countries as well, in Europe and in Asia.

Richard Falk, the well-known American expert on international law, has offered some wise observations about this, and I quote: "The war against global terrorism is far more a political and moral conflict than it is a military one. Adherence to human rights even for those accused or suspected of terrorist involvement would signal Washington's respect for life and human dignity. To act otherwise (...) discloses a kind of secular fundamentalism that blurs the nature of the conflict. Part of what should be defended is precisely a respect for human rights."

According to the Millennium Development Goals, fighting poverty is a vital means of tackling the causes of conflict in our world. One of the goals is to halve the amount of extreme poverty worldwide by the year 2015. The rich members of the UN community, therefore, must step up their aid to the developing countries, at least up to the 0.7 per cent target recommended by the UN.

The best support we could give the developing countries, however, would be greater trading opportunities and fewer trade restrictions. This applies in particular to agricultural products and other raw materials.

Later on here we will be discussing whether we are living up to our responsibilities towards the children of the world. Their rights are enshrined in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by 190 of the 192 member states. Yet children are dying from starvation, vaccination programmes are too few, and many children are receiving too little education. They are being exploited as child soldiers and they are being sexually abused. In modern warfare, it is not the armed combatants who are suffering most but the women and children.

Arms expenditure is once again rising rapidly, following a decline in sales in the aftermath of the Cold War. In 2003, total military expenditure in the world amounted to 956 billion US dollars. This represents an increase of 11 per cent over the past year and 18 per cent over the past two years.

The United States accounted for almost the entire increase, mainly due to the war in Iraq. Today, 32 rich countries, with only 16 per cent of the global population between them, account for 75 per cent of the world's military expenditure. The rich countries spend ten times more on military programmes than on development cooperation programmes.

The UN General Assembly should bring the question of military rearmament onto the agenda as soon as possible, preferably this autumn. The issue must once again be treated with the seriousness it deserves.

Unfortunately, there is also reason for renewed concern over nuclear arms. Although the number of active nuclear weapons has been reduced from over 50,000 warheads during the Cold War to around 20,000 today, there is growing concern about developments in this field. The five countries that previously made up the nuclear circle have now been joined by Israel, India and Pakistan, and possibly others.

The nuclear arms issue will once again be a focal point when the UN's review conference on the non-proliferation treaty is held in New York in April of next year. The meeting should be used to turn the nuclear spiral downwards and prevent the further spread of such weapons. To this end, the original nuclear powers should set an example by speeding up their disarmament programmes.

Environmental threats are another survival issue for humanity. Carbon dioxide emissions, the greenhouse effect, climate change and other warning signals justify drastic action to protect future life. If the developing countries were to get anywhere near the pollution levels *per capita* that the rich countries permit themselves, we would face a global catastrophe.

The rich countries must play their part by reducing their emissions. The Kyoto Protocol represents an important initial step, but far more is needed. This is why the United States' refusal to sign the protocol is a serious matter. Russia, however, seems to be moving towards a positive decision in this respect.

In the modern world, action is governed by strong national interests and goals. Common values are of secondary interest. The adverse effects of such an approach are becoming increasingly apparent.

To reverse this dangerous trend, we now need a new start for global action. Solidarity and cooperation between countries and continents must be placed at the forefront. The threats to human survival must be dealt with before all else.

A global civil ethic is needed to guide action within the global neighbourhood, and leadership infused with that ethic is vital to the quality of global governance.

Among the courses of action that are required for this purpose, I would like to recommend the following:

1. Appoint an independent commission to combat international terrorism and also to establish its causes.
2. Restore and strengthen the rule of international law. This presupposes a detailed and serious discussion about intervention and national sovereignty. Human rights must be shown more respect.
3. Failure to resolve the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians must lead not to resignation and despair but to renewed determination to succeed. The hatred generated by the conflict in the Middle East is spreading through the world and threatening progress in other areas.
4. The 2005 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons should focus on turning the nuclear spiral downwards and preventing additional countries from acquiring this doomsday weapon.
5. Threats against the environment ultimately concern the prospects for human survival. Together, we must acknowledge the gravity of the situation and act accordingly. As a first step, the Kyoto Protocol must be signed and observed by all countries.
6. Under the UN Child Convention, we are committed to protecting children's rights. Yet we are not even fulfilling our basic responsibilities towards our own children. In future, the situation of the child must be a key consideration in all policy planning. This applies to poverty alleviation, vaccination programmes, action against HIV and Aids, peacekeeping efforts, and policies in many other areas.
7. The United Nations should be reformed and strengthened. Member states must take on greater responsibilities and show greater respect for the world organisation. The Security Council should include a larger number of both permanent and rotating members and thus become more representative. The Secretary General must be given greater powers.

Thank you for giving me your attention.