

# **General Assembly President Calls for Solidarity To Defeat Culture of Selfishness**

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The President of the United Nations General Assembly today opened its annual high-level debate with a call for the 192 Member States to "choose the path of solidarity" to overturn what he described as a culture of selfishness that allowed millions of people worldwide to suffer in poverty or as a result of other man-made problems.

Miguel D'Escoto told dozens of world leaders gathered at UN Headquarters in New York that "a confluence of large-scale, interrelated crises" – including climate change, high food prices, natural disasters and the current global financial troubles – highlighted that it was time to change the way peoples and countries interacted with each other.

"If we are to seize the opportunities, we must move beyond lamentations, speech-making and statements of good intentions and take concrete action based on a firm resolve to replace the individualism and selfishness of the dominant culture with human solidarity as the golden rule that guides our behaviour," he said.

Mr. D'Escoto warned that the world was in danger of drowning in a "morass of maniacal, suicidal selfishness," causing problems as diverse as a lack of access to clean water, human trafficking, the arms build-up and gender inequalities.

These problems are hampering progress towards the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the series of targets to slash a host of social and economic ills by 2015, he said.

"More than half the world's people languish in hunger and poverty, while at the same time more and more money is spent on weapons, wars, luxuries and totally superfluous and unnecessary things."

"We must resist the temptation to bury our heads in the sand in an attempt to deny reality. Let us be brave enough to acknowledge the vast inequities that exist in the world and within most of our countries, even in many of the most developed

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countries. These inequities are time-bombs that will not simply go away if we ignore them."

The President said the world's most pressing problems were all man-made and could be largely traced back "to the lack of democracy at the United Nations. A small group of States take decisions based on selfish motives, and the world's poor are the ones who suffer the consequences."

He added that too many important decisions on key issues did not go through the General Assembly, even though it is supposed to represent the peoples of the world, and that the Assembly's decisions were often casually ignored.

While the UN "has done many laudable things" since its inception in 1945, "we must admit that in terms of eliminating war, achieving disarmament and ensuring international security, we have failed."

But Mr. D'Escoto spoke out against the attitude that this culture of selfishness was irreversible.

"The world has reached a point at which we have no alternative – either we love one another or we all perish; either we treat each other as brothers and sisters or we witness the beginning of the end of our human species. If we choose the path of solidarity, recognizing each other as brothers and sisters, we will open up new horizons of life and hope for everyone."

Mr. D'Escoto urged countries to commit themselves to respecting and defending two principles: the sovereign equality of all UN Member States, and the obligations of all members to meet their obligations under the UN Charter.

Nearly 120 heads of State or government are in attendance for today's opening of the high-level segment of the General Assembly, and representatives of all 192 Member States are expected to address the segment before it concludes next week.

Last Friday the Assembly adopted a work programme for the current session, its sixty-third, in which Member States will consider more than 150 separate agenda items. These included a request to seek an advisory opinion from the International

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Court of Justice on the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence in February.

Today's opening of the high-level segment follows a day-long meeting yesterday at UN Headquarters on Africa's development needs, while on Thursday Member States will meet to discuss progress towards the MDGs.

For more details go to UN News Centre at <http://www.un.org/news>