

General Assembly
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Sixty-first General Assembly

Plenary

103rd Meeting (AM)

General Assembly adopts texts on day of non-violence, Ethiopian millennium;

Pays tribute to former Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim

Secretary-General Says Waldheim Led United Nations

With Prudence, Perseverance, Precision during Deeply Challenging Time

The General Assembly, following a moment of silence in memory of the United Nations fourth Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, adopted two resolutions under its agenda on "culture of peace", deciding to observe an International Day of Non-Violence and recognizing the celebration of the Ethiopian Millennium as a unique African occasion.

Paying tribute to Mr. Waldheim, who passed away yesterday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Mr. Waldheim's ten years at the world body's helm had covered a deeply challenging time in the world in the life of the Organization. The world had looked very different when Mr. Waldheim had taken office on 1 January 1972, with the Cold War still in its "icy stages" and China yet to take its seat in the Assembly. The Middle East was to undergo upheavals that reverberated to the current day. Cyprus was to become a divided island, and more than 40 years on, its division had yet to heal. The Viet Nam War had yet to reach its end. When he left office in 1981, the world had undergone profound changes which could have had hardly been imagined 10 years before.

Describing Mr. Waldheim as a man who had "lived history", he said the former Secretary-General had needed to deploy every diplomatic and political skill acquired over a long career, including as Austria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs. He had led the Organization with prudence, perseverance and precision. As he expressed his condolences today to Mr. Waldheim's family, and to the people and Government of Austria, he paid tribute to him and to all his predecessors who have served in what has been called "the most impossible job on the earth".

Conveying his profound gratitude for the tribute to the late Secretary-General and Austria's former President, Austria's representative said Mr. Waldheim had dedicated his life to the service of international peace, development and freedom. During his tenure, Secretary-General Waldheim had not only tackled numerous international crises vigorously and courageously, but also addressed tirelessly global injustice in the socio-economic field and the challenges of the developing world. He had seen in the United Nations the indispensable forum to advance the common goals of mankind and had believed in the power of multilateral diplomacy. "Today we mourn the loss of an outstanding and distinguished diplomat and statesman," he said.

Adopting a text on the International Day of Non-Violence, contained in document A/61/L.62, the Assembly decided to observe the International Day, with effect from the sixty-second session, on 2 October each year. Bearing in mind that non-violence, tolerance, full respect for

all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, democracy, development, mutual understanding and respect of diversity, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, it invited all Member States, United Nations organizations, regional and non-governmental organizations and individuals to commemorate the International Day in an appropriate manner and to disseminate the message of non-violence, including through education and public awareness. It further requested the Secretary-General to recommend ways and means by which the United Nations system and the Secretariat could, within existing resources, assist Member States in organizing activities to commemorate the Day.

Introducing the text, Anand Sharma, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, said the idea of promoting the resolution originated from the Declaration adopted at the "International Conference on Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment -- Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century", which articulated a collective yearning to address hunger and poverty. He said the wide co-sponsorship of the draft resolution reflected the universal respect that Mahatma Gandhi commanded, noting that his mode of non-violence brought down colonialism and inspired leaders such as Badshah Khan. The draft was simple but significant, reaffirming the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence. Promoting non-violence in such a manner would significantly contribute to the realization of the goals set out in the 1999 United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

Adopting also without a vote a text on the Ethiopian Millennium, contained in document A/61/L.61, the Assembly recognized the year from 12 September 2007 to 11 September 2008 as the year commemorating the Ethiopian Millennium. Acknowledging that the Ethiopian Millennium starts on 12 September 2007, it welcomed the Declaration adopted by the Assembly of the African Union at its eighth ordinary session, held in Addis Ababa on 29 and 30 January 2007, in which it recognized the Millennium as a unique African occasion and called upon all African Union Member States, the Commission of the African Union and regional economic communities to extend their support towards its successful celebration.

Introducing that text, Ethiopia's representative said the event was not only for celebrating the unique and distinct nature of Ethiopia's calendar system, but also an occasion to overcome the diverse socio-economic difficulties facing his country. With its unique cultural traditions dating back to ancient times, the Ethiopian Millennium was one of the traditions that had passed down from generation to generation without interruption. While that heritage was a source of pride and joy to all Ethiopians, it was also Ethiopia's responsibility to use its heritage to extricate itself from poverty and create the necessary conditions for the country's overall development.

Speaking in explanation of the vote following action on the two texts adopted this morning, the United States representative, referring to the resolution on the Ethiopian Millennium, said his delegation had not participated in the adoption of the Universal Declaration for Cultural Diversity and was, therefore, not in a position to affirm or reaffirm it in its entirety. However, his delegation could affirm, as called for in the draft resolution, the appeal for greater solidarity on the basis of recognition of cultural diversity and awareness of the unity of humankind and the development of intercultural exchanges.

The representatives of Cameroon and Cuba also took the floor to make minor amendments to the texts.

The Assembly also took note of the fact that Niger and Côte d'Ivoire had made the necessary payment to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the United Nations Charter.

Also paying tribute to the former Secretary-General were the representatives of Tunisia on behalf of the African States, Singapore on behalf of the Asian States, Lithuania on behalf of the Eastern European States, Mexico on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, the United Kingdom on behalf of the Western European and other States and the United States on behalf of the host country.

The next meeting of the Assembly will be announced.

Statements

United Nations Secretary-General BAN KI-MOON said, when Kurt Waldheim had taken office on 1 January 1972 as the fourth United Nations Secretary-General, the world had looked very different than it did today. The Cold War had still been in its "icy stages" and China had yet to take its seat in the Assembly. The Middle East was to undergo upheavals that reverberate to the current day. Cyprus was to become a divided island, and more than 40 years on, its division had yet to heal. The Viet Nam War had yet to reach its end.

Kurt Waldheim's 10 years at the helm had covered a deeply challenging time in the world and in the life of the Organization, he said. He had needed to deploy every diplomatic and political skill acquired over a long career, including as Austria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs. He had led the Organization with prudence, perseverance and precision. Kurt Waldheim's initiatives as Secretary-General had ranged from pursuing good offices in Cyprus, to visiting Tehran to seek a release of hostages at the US embassy there, to appointing an envoy for the crisis ravaging Afghanistan and a mediator for the protracted Iran-Iraq war. When he left office in 1981, the world had undergone profound changes which could have had hardly been imagined 10 years before.

Continuing, the Secretary-General said that, when he had been serving as the Republic of Korea's Ambassador to Vienna, he had come to know Kurt Waldheim personally after Mr. Waldheim had retired from his public life. "He was a man who had lived history. The world had changed yet more, in even more unimaginable ways," he added. As he expressed his condolences today to Mr. Waldheim's family, and to the people and Government of Austria, the Secretary-General paid tribute to him and to all his predecessors who have served in what has been called the most impossible job on the earth.

ALI HACHANI (Tunisia), on behalf of the African States, extended to Mr. Waldheim's bereaved family its most sincere condolences. Mr. Waldheim had taken over the Organization's destiny at a crucial point in the world. He had demonstrated great determination to see that the Organization's principles and purposes would prevail. Mr. Waldheim would remain in the Organization's collective memory as an experienced statesman and sensitive to the concerns of the people, particularly the people of Africa.

VANU GOPALA MENON (Singapore), speaking on behalf of the Asian Group, noted that Mr. Waldheim had been the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations, succeeding U Thant. As noted by the Secretary-General, Mr. Waldheim had served the United Nations at a crucial period in the Organization's history. Shortly after coming into office, Mr. Waldheim had been confronted by a number of humanitarian disasters. In response, he had created the post of United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, which had led to the creation of the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO), the precursor to today's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

He said Mr. Waldheim had also come to the United Nations at a time of financial crisis. He had, nevertheless, managed to improve the Organization's financial status by various methods, including streamlining operations and reducing costs. Taking a keen interest in management issues, it had also been during Mr. Waldheim's tenure that the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) had been created. He extended his sympathies to the Government and people of Austria and to Mr. Waldheim's family.

RAIMONDA MURMOKAITE (Lithuania), speaking on behalf of the Eastern European States, expressed her delegation's sadness at the passing of Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, a dedicated statesman who was at the helm of the Organization during the 1970s. He would be remembered for his personal engagement in the search for solutions to the world's problems, and marshalling resources for some of the Organization's largest relief operations. She

extended her delegation's heartfelt condolences to Mr. Waldheim's family, and the Government and people of Austria.

CLAUDE HELLER (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, paid tribute to the memory of Kurt Waldheim, and conveyed condolences to the Austrian government and people. Noting Mr. Waldheim's exceptional abilities as a diplomat, he said he belonged to a generation that lived through a turbulent phase of history. Indeed, Mr. Waldheim led the Organization during a crucial period for international relations and sought solutions to conflicts that took an important place on the international agenda, including Cyprus, the Middle East, and the circumstances surrounding the birth of Bangladesh, among other issues. Further, he lent impetus to humanitarian affairs by appointing a Coordinator for Disaster Relief. Under his leadership, novel conferences were held on topics including trade and development, environment, population, food and women. The international community owed him for having made his own country one of the main venues of United Nations headquarters. He hoped Mr. Waldheim's contribution would be remembered as meaningful.

KAREN PIERCE (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the Western European and other States Group, said Kurt Waldheim, the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations, was dedicated to serving the United Nations during a critical period in its history. He made a point of visiting areas of special concern and tried to involve the Organization in the major world crises of his term of office.

RICHARD MILLER (United States), speaking on behalf of the United States as host country, joined in expressing sympathy and condolences to the family of Kurt Waldheim, the fourth United Nations Secretary-General, and to the people and Government of Austria. Mr. Waldheim had served the Organization for a decade and at a crucial point in its history.

GERHARD PFANZELTER (Austria), speaking on behalf of the Austrian Government and the Austrian people, conveyed his profound gratitude for paying tribute to the memory of the late Secretary-General and former President of Austria. "Today we mourn the loss of an outstanding and distinguished diplomat and statesman," he said. Kurt Waldheim had dedicated his life to the service of international peace, development and freedom. He had seen in the United Nations the indispensable forum to advance the common goals of mankind and had believed in the power of multilateral diplomacy. During his 10 years at the Organization's helm from 1972 to 1981 Secretary-General Waldheim had not only tackled numerous international crises vigorously and courageously, but also addressed tirelessly global injustice in the socio-economic field and the challenges of the developing world. Waldheim had remained committed to the cause of the United Nations throughout his life and had followed with keen interest all major developments in the world organization.

He said Mr. Waldheim had rejoiced in the fact that the United Nations had assumed a growing importance in the globalized world. In a final letter published this morning, Mr. Waldheim had considered his service for the United Nations as the most challenging and rewarding period of his life. He had called for reconciliation as a precondition for internal and external peace. Austrians remembered Mr. Waldheim also as a former President, Foreign Minister and diplomat who had served twice as Austria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. "He served our country with extraordinary devotion," he said.

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