

## «The role of the United Nations in the globalized world: promoting a new culture of international relations»

- Exposición realizada el 30 de julio de 2008 en la sede de la CEPAL por el presidente de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, Dr. Srgjan Kerim.

The history of CEPAL is the history of efforts to forge closer regional integration in Latin America.

As a European, I hope I can modestly claim that this model of regional integration is essential to overcome divides –whether ideological, political, economic or cultural. The European Union has made a very positive contribution to these goals and provided a template for others to follow. It is now a block of 27 countries, representing almost 500 million people and US\$15 trillions GDP in PPP terms –second only to the NAFTA which has GDP of US\$ 15.8 trillions. Considered as a single economy, the EU is the world’s largest economy by nominal a GDP.

UNASUR, with 12 member States and four official language combines the strengths and energies of 370 million people and has a combined GDP of almost US\$ 3 trillions in PPP terms.

It is clear from these developments that in the future regional integration will play an increasingly important role in global affairs.

However, regional solutions in themselves are insufficient to overcome the types of global challenges we are now con-

fronted with. Regional actions must feed into a common effort through the web of existing international institutions, primarily the United Nations, and must be based on shared values and shared responsibilities.

This is the reason why poverty reduction and economic development have been such critical priorities of the 62nd session of the General Assembly; and, why we have debated the recent global food and energy crisis, because these are issues that affect all, and which we must all be part of, if we are to agree on sustainable global solutions.

Rising fuel costs have increased prices for fertilizers and pesticides, land and subsidies set aside for bio-fuels has taken food off the world's table, and the growing demand for meat in Asia has diverted grain to livestock feed. Inflationary pressures have been unleashed even though there is enough food to go around.

However, the food crisis also offers a win-win opportunity for the international community to collectively agree to policies that promote trade efficiency while also boosting agricultural production and reducing the vulnerability of the poorest around the world.

The Secretary-General was right in establishing an interagency Task Force to address «*the widespread hunger, malnutrition and social unrest*» that soaring food prices have brought. About but we need to go further to identify the scope, nature and the implications of the food crisis, followed by concrete measures for its resolution.

This is why reviewing the implementation and delivering fresh progress on Monterrey is critical to meeting our key developmental goals – be they the 2015 target of the MDGs, or the short-term challenges of climate change.

If we really want to tackle the truly global challenges and also take full advantage of the benefits of globalization we now need to think radically about institutional reform: about creating a new culture of international relations to empower the individual, particularly the poorest.

In this regard, I would like to highlight the work of the Commission on the Legal Empowerment of the Poor, and in particular the contributions that have been made by Hernando de Soto, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Ernesto Zedillo.

In this context, and considering our focus during the 62nd session of the General Assembly on the MDGs and development more generally, I have observed that there is a real desire among the membership to begin a serious debate about the future role of the UN in Middle Income Countries.

The first reason for supporting middle-income countries is that they are essential in the global fight against poverty. Two-fifths of the world's people who live on less than two dollars a day live in these countries.

The second is to consolidate and make irreversible the development progress already achieved. This is critical for middle-income countries, as the high volatility of their economic growth has generated economic and political pressures that need to be stabilized.

The third is to support the capacity of middle-income countries to serve as hubs for development, a role that several of them play in their respective regions or sub-regions as key nodes in South-South cooperation.

The fourth is to bolster their efforts to contribute to international public goods, such as climate change, environmental sustainability, financial stability, prevention of contagious diseases, and peacebuilding.

The fifth is to ensure that the system for international development cooperation does not discriminate against those who have made advances.

When facing up to the challenges of their times after the ashes of the 2nd World War, world leaders of the day forged a new system of international relations for the 20th century. However, to face up to today's emergencies and deal with tomorrow's challenges we need to move beyond that historic vision and radically reshape the existing international architecture to adapt to the needs of the world of the 21st century. A world that is –more than ever– best described as a true global village and characterized by interdependence. Relations run deep, creating vast and dense interdependent networks in all spheres and at all levels, down to the level of the individual. The speed with which these interactions happen is also unprecedented.

This fluid and flexible state of global relations allows unique possibilities for global partnerships that also seriously involve non-governmental actors.

But the system is also more vulnerable. Major challenges become global problems that need global attention. And our responses to single issues are themselves interconnected and have impacts on other concerns.

The nexus between climate change, the food crisis, rising energy prices and the growing use of land to produce bio-fuels is a prime example.

Traditional attributes of power are losing their significance. Speed is becoming more important than size. Soon the traditional balance of power politics must give way to a new understanding based on an equilibrium of shared interests.

We need to fundamentally change our mindset. We need a new kind of internationalism that caters to a new kind of global society - based on principled pragmatism and shared responsibility: a new way of thinking about our shared fate and our shared responsibilities in a way that reflects the complexities of contemporary human and economic relations.

This new culture of international relations should not be super-imposed, but fluid and flexible to cope with our dynamic, changing world, and it should have the well-being of the individual and communities at its centre.

We are witnessing two major and interconnected shifts in world affairs –very much a product of globalization– that offer the prospect of achieving a new approach to deal with international relations.

The first shift is the move away from a state-centered policy towards human centered approaches that emphasize the individual as the primary subject and agent of policy – as the report on the Commission for the Legal Empowerment of the Poor also points to.

This shift is also characterized by the ‘disaggregation’ of national sovereignty.

The second major shift can be characterized as a gradual move from a stress and preoccupation on rights to the accentuation and acceptance of responsibilities that go along with these rights. This is true for the State as much as for the individual, but also, for all other actors in the international arena.

These two trends are interdependent. Through them we see the space for the emergence of a new culture of international relations.

So you may ask «what is role of the United Nations?»

Globalization certainly raises the potential advantage of the United Nations. It is still the only organization with a near universal membership and a wide international agenda.

Globalization has also enabled the emergence of capable and willing individuals, civil society groups, think tanks, global corporations and religious institutions that have a key role in shaping various aspects of the international policy making process.

If harnessed correctly non-state actors can play an instrumental role in addressing contemporary global challenges from climate change, and growing international inequalities, to terrorism, sustainable development and global financial turbulence.

Though states are no longer the sole actors in the international arena, they continue to set the rules of the game, at the national, regional and international levels.

This is precisely why the United Nations remains relevant and important. It is through the United Nations that global rules and norms of interaction are harmonized and coordinated –rules and norms that also govern the way non-state actors behave in the international arena.

At the same time, it is the unique convening power of the United Nations that allows for a multitude of stakeholder to be actively involved in this norm setting process and also to be part of a global partnership to develop solutions to the international problems we face.

In devising the priority issues of the current session of the General Assembly we have focused our attention on the pressing challenges that can only be addressed together; by the full membership of the Organization; by encouraging member states and the UN system to work closely together; and, by encouraging the active involvement of major non-state stakeholders such as civil society, academia and the private sector.

Our main priorities reflect the central role of development in the United Nations: responding to climate change, achieving the MDGs, advancing on Financing for Development and promoting the implementation of the global counter-terrorism strategy.

These key areas of work are supplemented by our continued drive to make progress on various aspects of UN management reform. In this regard, allow me to express my appreciation for the valuable contribution of Chile to promote management reform of the United Nations through the «Four Nations Initiative», alongside South Africa, Sweden and Thailand.

We need a more active and coherent United Nations system and stronger engagement from all members of the General Assembly. This is what the new culture of international relations is all about.

I am also convinced that the United Nations can provide the framework and should be the catalyst for this new culture.

To achieve this however, we need a fundamental renewal and radical rethinking of what we expect from the United Nations, the Bretton Woods Institutions, as well as, from other international and regional bodies. This is the real challenge for our immediate future.

Within the United Nations the most often heralded institutional reform relates to the Security Council, even though this is but only one aspect of the ongoing reforms that are necessary to transform the organization.

As Chairman of the Task Force working on this issue I believe we have a realistic chance to make progress. Member States by now –after over a decade of discussions know quite well the various positions– and all have been put on the table. In the Task Force, I had the pleasure to work closely with Ambassador Muñoz. His diplomatic skills and experience have been of great assistance to move this sensitive issue forward.

There is agreement that discussions should move to the level of intergovernmental negotiations. The objective must now be to reach general agreement to tackle the issue through an ‘intermediary approach’ –on a set of initial changes that would then be reviewed in 10-15 years. This would allow us to gain practical experience, as well as allowing Member States to retain their initial views and position.

In my view the ‘intermediary approach’ is the most viable option that would produce results considering current circumstances. We should not pass up this opportunity to move beyond the inertia of the last 15 years.

Changing the composition of the Security Council must not be an end in itself, however necessary it is as a first step. Reform of the Security Council must be part of embedding a new culture of international relations and more adequate regional representation.

The result must be a Council whose members are ready to share responsibility, willing and able to act to protect human life –as the body of last resort– whatever and wherever the threat may be.

Security Council reform, as well as the wider reform of the United Nations system, and indeed all our attempts at international institutional reforms, must rest on the fundamental aim of creating more flexible, dynamic forums capable of acting on the basis of equilibrium of interests.

World politics is certainly still also about war and peace and revolves around the exercise of power. But what is changing is the increasing opportunities we *all* have to make a difference. We now have more of a chance to become the subjects, the shapers of our own fate, of the fate of world politics, if you wish, rather than be subject to and objects of complex international relationship that confer power.