



General Assembly

Sixty-first session

103rd plenary meeting

Friday, 15 June 2007, 10 a.m.

New York

Official Records

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain)

In the absence of the President, Mrs. Mladineo (Croatia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of Kurt Waldheim, fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations

The Acting President: This morning, before we take up the item on our agenda, it is our sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of Kurt Waldheim, fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations, who passed away on 14 June 2007. Kurt Waldheim was Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1972 to 1981.

On behalf of the General Assembly and its President, and on my own behalf, I request the representative of Austria to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Austria and to the bereaved family of Kurt Waldheim.

I now invite members to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of Kurt Waldheim.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I join the General Assembly in solemn remembrance of the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations.

When Kurt Waldheim took office, on 1 January 1972, the world looked very different from the way it does today. The cold war was still in its icy stages. The People's Republic of China had just taken its seat in the Assembly. The Middle East was to undergo upheavals that reverberate to this day. Cyprus was to become a divided island, and more than 40 years later that division has yet to heal. The Viet Nam war had yet to reach its end.

Kurt Waldheim's 10 years at the helm covered a deeply challenging time in the world and in the life of our Organization. He 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 led the Organization with prudence, perseverance and precision.

Kurt Waldheim's initiatives as Secretary-General ranged from pursuing good offices in Cyprus and visiting Tehran to seek the release of hostages at the United States 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 that could hardly have been imagined 10 years before.

Almost two decades later, when I served as my country's ambassador to Vienna, I came to know Kurt Waldheim personally after his retirement from public life. He was a man who had lived history. The world had changed still more, in even more unimaginable ways.

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As I express my condolences today to Mr. Waldheim's family and to the people and the Government of Austria, I pay tribute to him and to all my predecessors, who have served in what has been called the most impossible job on Earth.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): The African Group learned with great sadness of the passing of Kurt Waldheim, former Secretary-General of the United Nations and former President of Austria. On this occasion, we should like to express our most heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and to the Government and the people of Austria.

Mr. Waldheim took up the destiny of our Organization at a crucial time for the world. Throughout his two mandates, he demonstrated a great determination to advance the principles and purposes of the Organization.

Mr. Waldheim will remain in the collective memory of our Organization as an experienced statesman and diplomat who was sensitive to the concerns of our peoples, in particular in Africa.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of Singapore, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Menon (Singapore): On behalf of the Group of Asian States, allow me to offer some words of condolence on the demise of Mr. Kurt Waldheim, who passed away yesterday at the age of 88. Mr. Waldheim was the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations, succeeding U Thant. Mr. Waldheim served two terms — from 1972 to 1981 — a challenging period that reflected cold war realities. As noted by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement issued yesterday, Mr. Waldheim served the United Nations in a crucial period in the history of the Organization.

Shortly after coming into office, Mr. Waldheim was confronted by a number of humanitarian disasters. In response, he created the post of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, which led to the creation of the United Nations Disaster Relief Office, which

was a precursor of today's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Mr. Waldheim also came to the United Nations at a time of financial crisis. Nevertheless, he managed to improve the financial status of the Organization by various methods, including streamlining operations and reducing costs. Mr. Waldheim also took a keen interest in management issues, and it was during his tenure that the International Civil Service Commission was created.

On this solemn occasion, I would like to extend, on behalf of the Asian Group, my sympathies to the Government and people of Austria. The Asian Group also extends its condolences to the family of Mr. Waldheim.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Ms. Murmokaite (Lithuania): On behalf of the countries of the Group of Eastern European States, I wish to say that it was with sadness that we heard of the passing away of Mr. Kurt Waldheim, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, a distinguished Austrian diplomat and statesman.

As Secretary-General at the helm of the United Nations throughout the turbulent 1970s, Mr. Waldheim is remembered for his personal engagement in the search for solutions in Namibia, Cyprus, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. He also marshalled the largest relief operations undertaken under United Nations auspices at the time, in Bangladesh and in the Sudano-Sahelian region of Africa.

I would like to use this opportunity to extend our heartfelt condolences to Mr. Waldheim's family and to the Government and the people of Austria.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, I would like to pay tribute to the memory of Kurt Waldheim and to convey our condolences to the Austrian Government and people as well as to Mr. Waldheim's family on the sad passing away of the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations.

With his exceptional career as a diplomat, ambassador, Minister for Foreign Affairs and President of Austria, Kurt Waldheim belonged to a generation that lived through a painful and turbulent phase in the history of his country and of Europe. His biography as well as that of his contemporaries remains controversial even today.

At the helm of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim directed the Organization at a crucial period for international relations. At critical times, he played an active part, seeking solutions to conflicts that took up a very important place at that time on the international agenda.

His performance, however, was affected by the limits of the cold war. South Africa, Namibia, the question of Cyprus, the Middle East conflict in its many facets, the dramatic circumstances surrounding the birth of Bangladesh as an independent State and the situation of Africa, among other topics, were the focus of his greatest efforts and personal involvement. The oil crisis in 1973 and the North-South divide furthered the debate on building a new international economic order; hence the importance that economic and social topics started to take on our Organization's agenda.

At the same time, Secretary-General Waldheim gave impetus to United Nations action in humanitarian assistance by appointing a Disaster Relief Coordinator and creating the United Nations Disaster Relief Office as the relevant agency within the system.

Under his leadership, a series of innovative international conferences were held, convened under the auspices of the United Nations: on trade and development, in Santiago de Chile in 1972; on the environment, in Stockholm in 1972; on the law of the sea, in Caracas in 1974; on population, in Bucharest in 1974; on world food issues, in Rome also in 1974; and on women, in Mexico in 1975.

We should also recall his participation in the meetings of the Security Council that were held away from Headquarters — in Addis Ababa in January 1972 and in Panama in March 1973 — and his participation in meetings of the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of American States.

The international community also has him to thank for having made his own country, Austria, and the city of Vienna, one of the main headquarters of the United Nations and of multilateralism. We hope that

Secretary-General Waldheim's contribution will be remembered as a meaningful chapter in the historical evolution of this Organization. May he rest in peace.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Group of Western European and other States and to make a statement on the passing of Kurt Waldheim, the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations.

As Secretary-General, Mr. Waldheim was dedicated to serving the United Nations during a critical period in its history. He made a point of visiting areas of specific concern to the United Nations. He also tried to involve the United Nations in the major world crises of his term in office. Mr. Waldheim also played a leading role in a number of major international conferences convened under United Nations auspices. These included the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which led to the conclusion of the landmark 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The members of the Group of Western European and other States would like to express their deepest sympathies and condolences to Ambassador Pfanzer and the Austrian mission, to the Austrian Government and people and to Mr. Waldheim's family.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States, the host country.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): On behalf of the United States as host country of the United Nations, I join others this morning in expressing our sympathy and condolences to the family of Kurt Waldheim, the fourth Secretary-General of the United Nations, and also to the people and Government of Austria. The United States notes that Secretary-General Waldheim served this Organization for a decade and at a crucial point in its history.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Pfanzer (Austria): On behalf of the Austrian Government and the Austrian people, I should like to convey to you, Madam President, the expression of our profound gratitude for your most thoughtful

gesture to pay tribute to the memory of the late Secretary-General of the United Nations and former President of the Republic of Austria, Mr. Kurt Waldheim.

Today we mourn the loss of an outstanding and distinguished diplomat and statesman. Kurt Waldheim dedicated his life to the service of international peace, development and freedom. He saw in the United Nations an indispensable forum for advancing the common goals of humankind. He believed in the power of multilateral diplomacy. During his 10 years at the helm of our Organization, from 1972 to 1981, Secretary-General Waldheim not only tackled numerous international crises vigorously and courageously, but also addressed tirelessly global injustice in the economic and social fields and the challenges of the developing world.

Mr. Waldheim remained committed to the cause of the United Nations throughout his life — until the very end of his life — and followed with keen interest all major developments in the world Organization. He rejoiced in the fact that the United Nations has assumed a growing importance in our globalized world.

In a final letter that was published this morning, Kurt Waldheim stated that he considered his service to the United Nations as the most challenging and rewarding period of his life. He called for reconciliation as a precondition for internal and external peace.

Austrians, of course, also remember Kurt Waldheim as a former President and Foreign Minister who served twice as our Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He served our country with extraordinary devotion.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General and to the representatives of the regional groups and of the host country, who have thoughtfully paid tribute to the late Secretary-General in highlighting his achievements.

Agenda item 122 (continued)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/61/709/Add.7 and 8)

The Acting President: I should like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to documents

A/61/709/Add.7 and 8, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communications contained in documents A/61/709 and addenda 1 to 6, the Niger and Côte d'Ivoire have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in these documents?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 44 (continued)

Culture of peace

Draft resolutions (A/61/L.61 and A/61/L.62)

The Acting President: Members will recall that the Assembly held the debate on this agenda item at its 47th and 48th plenary meetings, on 3 November 2006.

Members will also recall that under this item, the Assembly adopted resolutions 61/45, 61/221, 61/255 and 61/269 on 4 and 20 December 2006, on 26 January 2007 and on 25 May 2007, respectively.

I give the floor to the representative of Ethiopia to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.61.

Mr. Batora (Ethiopia): Let me at the outset express the deepest condolences of the Government and of the people of Ethiopia to the Austrian Government and people as well as to the family of Mr. Kurt Waldheim on the passing of the former Secretary-General.

Mr. Waldheim was not only one of the outstanding Secretaries-General of our Organization but also an experienced statesman with a great vision for his country, Austria, and the world.

I have the honour and great pleasure to introduce, on behalf of all sponsors, the draft resolution on the Ethiopian Millennium contained in document A/61/L.61, under Assembly agenda item 44, entitled "Culture of peace".

I should like also to inform the Assembly that the Central African Republic, Chile, China, the Czech Republic, Honduras, Italy, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Mauritius, Oman and the Republic of Korea have joined us as sponsors of the draft resolution.

In that regard, I wish to draw the attention of the Assembly to a technical error in the third line of paragraph 2. The word “including” should be replaced by the word “for”.

The draft resolution calls on the Assembly to show its solidarity with the peoples of Ethiopia in the celebration of the Ethiopian Millennium. It also welcomes the decision taken by my Government to commemorate the event as the contribution of Ethiopia to the promotion of a culture of peace at the national, regional and international levels.

This draft resolution further strengthens the eighth African Union summit Declaration, which considers the Ethiopian Millennium as part of the African heritage by showing the Millennium’s universal aspect and its significance to the world’s cultural diversity.

Ethiopia, as is well known, has unique cultural traditions whose origins date back to ancient times. The Ethiopian Millennium is one of those traditions that has been passed down to us from generation to generation without interruption. That heritage is a source of pride and joy for all Ethiopians. However, it is also our responsibility to use that heritage to extricate ourselves from poverty and create the necessary conditions for the overall development of our country.

It is in that context that we have been preparing ourselves over the last few years to celebrate the event by promoting awareness and mobilization within our society and the diaspora for the attainment of the goals we have set for sustainable development, building democratic governance and forging stronger unity and political consensus to join hands to work towards a prosperous Ethiopia in the new millennium. The event, therefore, will be not only a way of celebrating the unique and distinct nature of our calendar system but also an opportunity for overcoming the diverse socioeconomic difficulties that Ethiopia is currently facing.

My delegation is confident that the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus, since not only is the event non-controversial, but it will also help to promote and further strengthen cultural understanding among the peoples of the world. The promotion of such heritage, handed on to us by past generations, is a key to enriching and preserving our diverse history and our multicultural world.

In conclusion, I wish to express our deep appreciation to the President of the General Assembly, Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, for her unreserved support, as well as to all the countries that have co-sponsored the draft resolution and that provided valuable support during the drafting stage. Our appreciation goes also to the Secretariat for the technical assistance and cooperation that it provided for the successful completion of the draft resolution.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Anand Sharma, Minister of State for External Affairs of India, to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.62.

Mr. Sharma (India): I have the honour to introduce, under agenda item 44, draft resolution A/61/L.62, entitled “International Day of Non-Violence”. In addition to the 114 sponsors named in the document, I have the pleasure to inform the Assembly that a further 26 member States have also become sponsors, bringing the number of sponsors to 140.

The idea of promoting such a resolution originated in the declaration adopted at the international conference entitled “Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment: Gandhian Philosophy in the Twenty-first Century”, convened in New Delhi in January this year to commemorate the centenary of the Satyagraha movement, launched by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. The conference was attended by leadership delegations of 91 countries and 122 organizations, in addition to many eminent personalities, including philosophers and Nobel laureates. The participants solemnly vowed to nurture the values espoused by Mahatma Gandhi. They articulated the collective yearning for a new way forward to address the problems of hunger and dehumanizing poverty, which continue to plague humanity, and to build a just and equitable world in which people live with dignity and in peace and harmony with each other in diverse and pluralistic societies.

The wide and diverse sponsorship of the draft resolution reflects the universal respect that Mahatma Gandhi commands and the enduring relevance of his humane philosophy. In his own words,

“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man”.

His novel mode of mass mobilization and non-violent action brought down colonialism, strengthened the roots of popular sovereignty and civil, political and economic rights, greatly influenced many freedom struggles and inspired leaders like Badshah Khan, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and many others.

The draft resolution would declare Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary — 2 October — an International Day of Non-Violence. By doing so, we would be highlighting the holistic nature and the continued relevance of Mahatma's message for our times — indeed, for all time to come. It encompasses the rejection of violence against oneself, against others, against other groups, against other societies and against nature. Non-violence, in Mahatma's own words, has no room for cowardice or even weakness. It also necessitates complete abstention from exploitation in any form.

The draft resolution before the General Assembly is simple but significant. Presented under the agenda item "Culture of Peace", it reaffirms, in its preambular paragraphs, the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence and seeks to secure a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and non-violence.

By its operative paragraph 1 the draft resolution would decide to observe and celebrate 2 October every year as the International Day of Non-Violence. Operative paragraph 2 invites all Member States, the United Nations system and regional and non-governmental organizations to commemorate the Day in an appropriate manner and to disseminate the message of non-violence, including through education and public awareness. The draft resolution also requests the Secretary-General to recommend ways to assist Member States in organizing activities to commemorate the Day, to take necessary measures for the observance of the Day by the United Nations system and to keep the General Assembly informed at its sixty-third session on implementation within the United Nations system of the resolution as regards the observance of the International Day of Non-Violence.

Promoting the principle of non-violence in such a focused manner would, it is hoped, 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 (resolution 53/243). The designation of 2 October as the International Day of Non-Violence would also advance the implementation

of the goals of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly and each and every one of the sponsors and supporters for helping us to pilot the draft resolution in the Assembly. It is also the hope of the sponsors that the draft resolution will be adopted without a vote.

The Acting President: The Assembly will first take action on draft resolution A/61/L.61, entitled "The Ethiopian Millennium".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/61/L.61?

Draft resolution A/61/L.61 was adopted (resolution 61/270).

The Acting President: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/61/L.62.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. Kelley (Director, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): In connection with draft resolution A/61/L.62, entitled "International Day of Non-violence", I wish to put on record the following statement of financial implications on behalf of the Secretary-General, in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

"Under the terms of operative paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of the draft resolution, the Secretariat envisaged that the following activities would be undertaken from within existing resources by the Department of Public Information: first, a web site for the International Day of Non-violence; secondly, a United Nations Radio story; thirdly, a United Nations News Centre story; fourthly, a backgrounder; fifthly, guidance to United Nations Information Centres on the Day; and, sixthly, non-governmental organization briefings on the Day.

"With regard to paragraph 5, those efforts will be reported to the General Assembly at the sixty-third session.

“Accordingly, the adoption of draft resolution A/61/L.62 would not give rise to additional requirements under the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007.”

The Acting President: I thank the representative of the Secretariat.

The Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/61/L.62, entitled “International Day of Non-Violence”.

The following countries have become sponsors of the draft resolution: Andorra, Azerbaijan, Belize, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, the Central African Republic, Cuba, Cyprus, Djibouti, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Panama, Peru, Suriname, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey and Uruguay.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/61/L.62?

Draft resolution A/61/L.62 was adopted (resolution 61/271).

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted. May I remind delegations that such explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by representatives from their seats.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): I have asked for the floor in connection with the adoption of draft resolution A/61/L.61, entitled “The Ethiopian Millennium”.

The United States did not participate in the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and is therefore not in a position to affirm or reaffirm that document in its entirety. However, we are in a position to affirm, as stated in the resolution, “its appeal for greater solidarity on the basis of recognition of cultural diversity, awareness of the unity of humankind and the development of intercultural exchanges”.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 44.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.