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**Remarks to the Opening Session of
the 53d United Nations General
Assembly in New York City**

September 21, 1998

Thank you very much. Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, the delegates of this 53d session of the General Assembly, let me begin by thanking you for your very kind and generous welcome and by noting that at the opening of this General Assembly the world has much to celebrate.

Peace has come to Northern Ireland after 29 long years. Bosnia has just held its freest elections ever. The United Nations is actively mediating crises before they explode into war all around the world. And today, more people determine their own destiny than at any previous moment in history.

We celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with those rights more widely embraced than ever before. On every continent, people are leading lives of integrity and self-respect, and a great deal of credit for that belongs to the United Nations.

Still, as every person in this room knows, the promise of our time is attended by perils. Global economic turmoil today threatens to undermine confidence in free markets and democracy. Those of us who benefit particularly from this economy have a special responsibility to do more to minimize the turmoil and extend the benefits of global markets to all citizens. And the United States is determined to do that.

We still are bedeviled by ethnic, racial, religious, and tribal hatreds; by the spread of weapons of mass destruction; by the almost frantic effort of too many states to acquire such weapons. And despite all efforts to contain it, terrorism is not fading away with the end of the 20th century. It is a continuing defiance of Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says, and I quote, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person."

Here at the U.N., at international summits around the world, and on many occasions in

the United States, I have had the opportunity to address this subject in detail, to describe what we have done, what we are doing, and what we must yet do to combat terror. Today I would like to talk to you about why all nations must put the fight against terrorism at the top of our agenda.

Obviously this is a matter of profound concern to us. In the last 15 years, our citizens have been targeted over and over again, in Beirut, over Lockerbie, in Saudi Arabia, at home in Oklahoma City by one of our own citizens, and even here in New York in one of our most public buildings, and most recently on August 7th in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, where Americans who devoted their lives to building bridges between nations, people very much like all of you, died in a campaign of hatred against the United States.

Because we are blessed to be a wealthy nation with a powerful military and worldwide presence active in promoting peace and security, we are often a target. We love our country for its dedication to political and religious freedom, to economic opportunity, to respect for the rights of the individual. But we know many people see us as a symbol of a system and values they reject, and often they find it expedient to blame us for problems with deep roots elsewhere.

But we are no threat to any peaceful nation, and we believe the best way to disprove these claims is to continue our work for peace and prosperity around the world. For us to pull back from the world's trouble spots, to turn our backs on those taking risks for peace, to weaken our own opposition to terrorism, would hand the enemies of peace a victory they must never have.

Still, it is a grave misconception to see terrorism as only, or even mostly, an American problem. Indeed, it is a clear and present danger to tolerant and open societies and innocent people everywhere. No one in this room, nor the people you represent, are immune.

Certainly not the people of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. For every American killed there, roughly 20 Africans were murdered and 500 more injured, innocent people going about their business on a busy morning. Not the people of Omagh, in Northern Ireland,

where the wounded and killed were Catholics and Protestants alike, mostly children and women—and two of them pregnant—people out shopping together, when their future was snuffed out by a fringe group clinging to the past. Not the people of Japan who were poisoned by sarin gas in the Tokyo subway. Not the people of Argentina who died when a car bomb decimated a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. Not the people of Kashmir and Sri Lanka killed by ancient animosities that cry out for resolution. Not the Palestinians and Israelis who still die year after year for all the progress toward peace. Not the people of Algeria enduring the nightmare of unfathomable terror with still no end in sight. Not the people of Egypt, who nearly lost a second President to assassination. Not the people of Turkey, Colombia, Albania, Russia, Iran, Indonesia, and countless other nations where innocent people have been victimized by terror.

Now, none of these victims are American, but every one was a son or a daughter, a husband or wife, a father or mother, a human life extinguished by someone else's hatred, leaving a circle of people whose lives will never be the same. Terror has become the world's problem. Some argue, of course, that the problem is overblown, saying that the number of deaths from terrorism is comparatively small, sometimes less than the number of people killed by lightning in a single year. I believe that misses the point in several ways.

First, terrorism has a new face in the 1990's. Today, terrorists take advantage of greater openness and the explosion of information and weapons technology. The new technologies of terror and their increasing availability, along with the increasing mobility of terrorists, raise chilling prospects of vulnerability to chemical, biological, and other kinds of attacks, bringing each of us into the category of possible victim. This is a threat to all humankind.

Beyond the physical damage of each attack, there is an even greater residue of psychological damage, hard to measure but slow to heal. Every bomb, every bomb threat has an insidious effect on free and open institutions, the kinds of institutions all of you in this body are working so hard to build.

Each time an innocent man or woman or child is killed, it makes the future more hazardous for the rest of us. For each violent act saps the confidence that is so crucial to peace and prosperity. In every corner of the world, with the active support of U.N. agencies, people are struggling to build better futures, based on bonds of trust connecting them to their fellow citizens and with partners and investors from around the world.

The glimpse of growing prosperity in Northern Ireland was a crucial factor in the Good Friday Agreement. But that took confidence—confidence that cannot be bought in times of violence. We can measure each attack and the grisly statistics of dead and wounded, but what are the wounds we cannot measure?

In the Middle East, in Asia, in South America, how many agreements have been thwarted after bombs blew up? How many businesses will never be created in places crying out for investments of time and money? How many talented young people in countries represented here have turned their backs on public service?

The question is not only how many lives have been lost in each attack, but how many futures were lost in their aftermath. There is no justification for killing innocents. Ideology, religion, and politics, even deprivation and righteous grievance do not justify it. We must seek to understand the roiled waters in which terror occurs; of course, we must.

Often, in my own experience, I have seen where peace is making progress, terror is a desperate act to turn back the tide of history. The Omagh bombing came as peace was succeeding in Northern Ireland. In the Middle East, whenever we get close to another step toward peace, its enemies respond with terror. We must not let this stall our momentum.

The bridging of ancient hatreds is, after all, a leap of faith, a break with the past, and thus a frightening threat to those who cannot let go of their own hatred. Because they fear the future, in these cases, terrorists seek to blow the peacemakers back into the past.

We must also acknowledge that there are economic sources of this rage as well. Poverty, inequality, masses of disenfranchised young people are fertile fields for the siren

call of the terrorists and their claims of advancing social justice. But deprivation cannot justify destruction, nor can inequity ever atone for murder. The killing of innocents is not a social program.

Nevertheless, our resolute opposition to terrorism does not mean we can ever be indifferent to the conditions that foster it. The most recent U.N. human development report suggests the gulf is widening between the world's haves and have-nots. We must work harder to treat the sources of despair before they turn into the poison of hatred. Dr. Martin Luther King once wrote that the only revolutionary is a man who has nothing to lose. We must show people they have everything to gain by embracing cooperation and renouncing violence. This is not simply an American or a Western responsibility; it is the world's responsibility.

Developing nations have an obligation to spread new wealth fairly, to create new opportunities, to build new open economies. Developed nations have an obligation to help developing nations stay on the path of prosperity and—and—to spur global economic growth. A week ago I outlined ways we can build a stronger international economy to benefit not only all nations but all citizens within them.

Some people believe that terrorism's principal faultline centers on what they see as an inevitable clash of civilizations. It is an issue that deserves a lot of debate in this great hall. Specifically, many believe there is an inevitable clash between Western civilization and Western values, and Islamic civilizations and values. I believe this view is terribly wrong. False prophets may use and abuse any religion to justify whatever political objectives they have, even cold-blooded murder. Some may have the world believe that almighty God himself, the Merciful, grants a license to kill. But that is not our understanding of Islam.

A quarter of the world's population is Muslim, from Africa to Middle East to Asia and to the United States, where Islam is one of our fastest growing faiths. There are over 1,200 mosques and Islamic centers in the United States, and the number is rapidly increasing. The 6 million Americans who worship there will tell you there is no inherent

clash between Islam and America. Americans respect and honor Islam.

As I talk to Muslim leaders in my country and around the world, I see again that we share the same hopes and aspirations: to live in peace and security, to provide for our children, to follow the faith of our choosing, to build a better life than our parents knew, and pass on brighter possibilities to our own children. Of course, we are not identical. There are important differences that cross race and culture and religion which demand understanding and deserve respect.

But every river has a crossing place. Even as we struggle here in America, like the United Nations, to reconcile all Americans to each other and to find greater unity in our increasing diversity, we will remain on a course of friendship and respect for the Muslim world. We will continue to look for common values, common interests, and common endeavors. I agree very much with the spirit expressed by these words of Mohammed: "Rewards for prayers by people assembled together are twice those said at home."

When it comes to terrorism, there should be no dividing line between Muslims and Jews, Protestants and Catholics, Serbs and Albanians, developed societies and emerging countries. The only dividing line is between those who practice, support, or tolerate terror, and those who understand that it is murder, plain and simple.

If terrorism is at the top of the American agenda—and should be at the top of the world's agenda—what, then, are the concrete steps we can take together to protect our common destiny? What are our common obligations? At least, I believe, they are these: to give terrorists no support, no sanctuary, no financial assistance; to bring pressure on states that do; to act together to step up extradition and prosecution; to sign the global anti-terror conventions; to strengthen the biological weapons and chemical conventions; to enforce the Chemical Weapons Convention; to promote stronger domestic laws and control the manufacture and export of explosives; to raise international standards for airport security; to combat the conditions that spread violence and despair.

We are working to do our part. Our intelligence and law enforcement communities

are tracking terrorist networks in cooperation with other governments. Some of those we believe responsible for the recent bombing of our Embassies have been brought to justice. Early this week I will ask our Congress to provide emergency funding to repair our Embassies, to improve security, to expand the worldwide fight against terrorism, to help our friends in Kenya and Tanzania with the wounds they have suffered.

But no matter how much each of us does alone, our progress will be limited without our common efforts. We also will do our part to address the sources of despair and alienation through the Agency for International Development in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America, in Eastern Europe, in Haiti, and elsewhere. We will continue our strong support for the U.N. development program, the U.N. High Commissioners for Human Rights and Refugees, UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Food Program. We also recognize the critical role these agencies play and the importance of all countries, including the United States, in paying their fair share.

In closing, let me urge all of us to think in new terms on terrorism, to see it not as a clash of cultures or political action by other means, or a divine calling, but a clash between the forces of the past and the forces of the future, between those who tear down and those who build up, between hope and fear, chaos and community.

The fight will not be easy. But every nation will be strengthened in joining it, in working to give real meaning to the words of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights we signed 50 years ago. It is very, very important that we do this together.

Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the authors of the Universal Declaration. She said in one of her many speeches in support of the United Nations, when it was just beginning, "All agreements and all peace, are built on confidence. You cannot have peace, and you cannot get on with other people in the world unless you have confidence in them."

It is not necessary that we solve all the world's problems to have confidence in one another. It is not necessary that we agree on all the world's issues to have confidence in one another. It is not even necessary that we understand every single difference among us

to have confidence in one another. But it is necessary that we affirm our belief in the primacy of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and therefore, that together we say terror is not a way to tomorrow; it is only a throwback to yesterday. And together—*together*—we can meet it and overcome its threats, its injuries, and its fears with confidence.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. in the Assembly Hall at the United Nations. In his remarks, he referred to U.N. General Assembly President Didier Opertti; and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Remarks at a United Nations Luncheon in New York City *September 21, 1998*

Mr. Secretary-General, members of the Secretariat, President Opertti, fellow leaders, first let me thank the Secretary-General for his remarks and for his leadership and echo his remarks.

Franklin Roosevelt coined the term "United Nations." I think we all agree that we are more and more united with every passing year. We are more and more against the same things, but even more important, we are more and more for the same things. The United States has been a great beneficiary of the United Nations, and we honor the location of the United Nations here and the chance to be partners with all of you.

I would like to say just one particular word about the Secretary-General. I believe he has truly been the right leader for this time. In the United States we are ending the baseball season in our country, and here in New York there was once a great baseball figure named Leo Durocher whose most famous saying was "Nice guys finish last." Kofi Annan proves that Leo Durocher was wrong. He has proceeded with great kindness and decency. He has proved to all of us that change is possible and that, in his words, one can dare to make a difference. He has stood for human rights and peace. He has demonstrated both strength and courage and humility and infinite patience.