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THE STATE OF THE WORLD

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Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured to have been invited to give this keynote address on the state of the world to such a distinguished gathering. Having read the superb addresses given by Jean André François-Poncet, Ingvar Carlsson, Malcolm Fraser and Helmut Schmidt in recent years, I must say I am also greatly intimidated.

It is a particular pleasure to be giving this address in the Kingdom of Jordan. You are richly endowed with history and ancient civilisation, just as you are playing an indispensable role in the region in today's world. I bring you warmest wishes from all at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

When you, the Interaction Council, invited me to address you, I was President of the Sixtieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly – a post that I continue to hold until September. Neither you nor I could then have realized that I would address you one week into my additional role as Foreign Minister of Sweden. I cannot think of a more prominent group to address for the first time after my appointment. The views I express today however are primarily based on my personal experiences as a Swedish diplomat, as an Undersecretary-General in the UN, and now as General Assembly President.

It is indeed fitting that we are meeting this year in Jordan. Many of the major issues affecting the world in 2006 have particular resonance in this part of the world. The situation in Israel and Palestine and the instability in Iraq are two obvious examples. Sad to say, you have also had first hand experience of the menace of terrorism over the last year. During the last few weeks, we have witnessed terrorist attacks not far from here, both in Egypt and Israel. I know all others here will join me in offering our sympathies to the families of those affected and our condemnation of those responsible.

With this in mind, it is appropriate that I begin my review of the last twelve months by commenting on global terrorism. Not so many years ago, it would have been fair to say that most terrorist activity was largely nationally based. In the UK, for example, the Government was dealing with the IRA. Of course many terrorist organisations had international networks of some sort, for procuring weapons or laundering money. But the agendas they claimed to espouse were national, and the best responses were often national.

But how things have changed. Terrorism today knows no borders. There are now few countries around the world that do not have to take the threat seriously. Over the last year, we have seen attacks in places as far apart as India, Indonesia, Egypt and the UK. And, though it is hard to understand, the so-called 'justification' for the attacks has an international character, just as there are international elements in the organisation and execution of many of the attacks.

What is most important is that we further develop our global responses in a way which is effective but never compromises our commitments and values in international law and human rights. In New York, alongside the negotiations on a comprehensive

convention on counter-terrorism, a start is about to be made on a counter-terrorism strategy. I am doing all I can to encourage Member States to agree on a strategy which can deliver practical and concrete results on the ground.

Some of the debate on terrorism relates to the extent to which perceived injustices in the world build support for terrorist acts. That is not a debate I want to add to today. But the very fact that there are situations in our world which many consider unjust is a problem in itself that we ignore at our peril.

The Israeli-Palestinian situation is clearly one of these. The picture is currently bleak. This makes it more important than ever that the peace process be revived, based on achieving the two state solution. This will require negotiations, respect for international law and a recognition on all sides that terrorism in all its forms must be rejected.

There were probably many reasons why the Palestinian people voted the way they did, many of them to do with governance and delivery of basic services – the bread and butter issues of any democratic system. But this does not make it any less important that the new government responds to the fundamental points put to them by the Quartet. Both Israelis and Palestinians now face difficult dilemmas and will need to take bold and courageous steps.

Meanwhile, the deteriorating humanitarian and socio-economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza is in nobody's interests. Dealing with this in a humane and effective way is a responsibility for us all.

So the world needs to redouble its efforts to help the Israelis and Palestinians to find a way forward. We must do this in order to enable the Israelis and Palestinians to build a better future for themselves and to live side by side in peace. We must also do it in the interests of regional and world stability. For as long as we do not, many people across the world, particularly the Islamic world, will continue to feel an acute sense of injustice.

Meanwhile, across Jordan's eastern border lies Iraq. Yesterday's debate was over whether it was right for a limited number of countries to go to war in Iraq. Today's debate is over how the international community can best help the Iraqi people and their government rebuild a stable and democratic Iraq, in which the rights of all – majorities and minorities alike – are respected.

I do not have a prescription today for Iraq's future. That is for Iraqis to decide. But I am sure that the international community as a whole cannot take the attitude that if a limited of countries are engaged in the current state of affairs, the same group should be left to resolve it. That would be a gross disservice to the Iraqi people, who have suffered so much. And it would also leave unhealed this major source of grievance for so many of our fellow human beings.

There have this year been other sources of grievance. It may be one of the downsides of our globalised world that cartoons published in a Danish newspaper can result in prolonged protests around the world, deplorable attacks on Embassies, tragic loss of

lives, and a lingering sense of alienation and anger on all sides. This painful series of events caused many in Europe to think long and hard about the boundaries of freedom of expression in a democracy.

But what was most troubling, in my view, was the gulf in understanding it revealed between many in the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. Just as some could not understand why it was a problem to publish the cartoons – and could understand even less the outrage it provoked – others could not understand why the Danes and others were not willing to prevent their publication. It is possible that some of the protests may have been orchestrated by those with their own agendas. But we make a great misjudgement if we do not recognise the deep anguish felt by many people related to these events.

It was also striking that the so-called 'clash of civilisations' occurred not only between regions and countries, but within them. Some have argued that the sense of alienation from mainstream society felt by many Muslims living in Europe is just as important a cause of grievance as the situations in Israel, Palestine and Iraq. The fact that four young British Muslims decided to blow themselves up in London last summer is an indicator of a serious problem we must all address.

And it needs to be addressed soon. Other events, in Europe in particular, indicate that the instinctive reactions of some to these events is likely only to deepen divides. Despite a shortage of skilled labour across parts of Europe, and despite a dramatically ageing population, there is a desire amongst some to 'pull up the drawbridge', to resist further immigration, to display hostility toward asylum seekers, to rethink the expansion of the European Union, and to seek to rely on the old certainties of a bygone age.

Responding to these challenges is a great test for the world's current political leaders. It can seem hard for governments to reach out to their marginalised communities when some with less noble agendas seek to persuade our electorates that they are already treated too well. It may seem hard to explain the benefits of European expansion when a large part of one's population is feeling insecure about the future. But the costs of not doing so are immense.

We have already seen the radicalisation of some parts of Muslim youth on the one hand, and the increasing appeal of far-right parties on the other. We need to stop this downward spiral before it goes too far. This can be done in part through initiatives such as the Global Agenda for Dialogue of Civilisations, the Alliance of Civilisations and the Amman Message.

Arresting the downward spiral is also a domestic policy issue. In the north, we need greater opportunities for all our citizens, and we need to bring hope to young people, particularly in some of our inner-city communities. We need also a 'dialogue between civilizations' within the cities of the north, where we have too many people who live alongside each other but are worlds apart.

In our global, interlinked world, I fear there are other unresolved issues which can create a sense of injustice for many. One such issue is that of trade.

One of the major tasks for the international community in 2006 will be to conclude the Doha round by the end of the year. Thus far the world collectively has not risen to the challenge. The crucial meeting planned for Geneva last week had to be cancelled. Resistance to reform in developed countries – a response to popular anxieties – is not the only stumbling block, but it is one of them.

It is hard to defend the status quo, where – for example – rich countries currently support their agriculture to the tune of $279 billion a year. That is over ten times current aid to Africa, a sum comparable to the income of the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. In Europe, 40% of the EU budget goes to subsidies and support to Europe's farmers who represent 5% of Europe's population and produce less than 2% of Europe's output. Trade barriers also attract criticism – they were referred to last year by the Commission for Africa as 'absolutely unacceptable, politically antiquated, economically illiterate, environmentally destructive and ethically indefensible'.

Why does progress on trade matter? For two reasons. First, it is a matter of life and death to many in developing countries. We fool ourselves if we see trade as an adjunct to aid and debt in the fight against poverty. Without a breakthrough on trade, we have little hope of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Second, a deal on a fairer rules-based world trading regime is in all our interests. It could be key to stimulating revived economic growth across the developed world. There is a World Bank study which claims that trade liberalisation could increase worldwide economic growth by $287 billion per year by 2015.

On trade I believe there is a recurring paradox. The great benefits of an international agreement are proven. The risks for all of us in maintaining the status quo – in terms of the sense of grievance it generates – are manifest. Yet, and this is the paradox, at the national level too many of us are tempted to go down the road of short-term solutions that are in our national interest only in the narrowest sense.

This leads me to the broader question of development, which is a central concern for me. Though I talk today in general terms, we must not forget what this is all about in reality. Bringing clean water to more than a billion people who go without it. Getting girls into school. Stemming the tide of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In 2006, the many commitments of 2005 need to be turned quickly into implementation. In particular, it is vital that the promised additional aid is delivered well and on time. Many developing country representatives in New York are understandably anxious that this time the rhetoric becomes reality.

This year we have a once in a generation opportunity to heal the scar of world poverty. Across much of the developed world, there is heightened popular awareness of poverty and support for work to tackle it. Meanwhile, many lessons have been learned about

what works in the delivery of aid. We know how to support countries' own efforts to develop, with excellent results. Aid is far less politicised than it once was. The mixed motives and sometimes inappropriate targeting of the Cold War era are largely behind us.

Most important of all, there is a renaissance underway in many of the poorest countries themselves, particularly in Africa. We should not forget that 2005 saw important commitments from the African Union on good governance and fighting corruption alongside the equally important commitments made by the West. As Africa itself acknowledged, further progress on these elements is a vital component of the fight against poverty.

Fortunately, across increasing parts of Africa there are now real reformers in charge. Most recently, we saw the election of President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson in Liberia. These new reformers are wise and determined and they need our support. As you will know better than most, reform is not easy. Things often get worse before they get better. Imagine trying to push it through in a country without a long democratic tradition and where the majority of the population is already below the poverty line. Faced with this scenario, the new generation of African leaders is not asking our indulgence for compromises. They are asking for our solid, long-term support to back their reform programmes.

So if we act now, an end to poverty will be in our grasp more firmly than ever. But if we are half-hearted, and fail to deliver, the taxpayers of the north will lose heart just as the reformers in the south will run out of steam. Instead of an end to poverty, we could see an end to development as we know it. The implications for all of us would be too grim to contemplate.

Of course, in some places the picture is deeply troubling. Chief amongst these is in my mind Darfur. Only last week, we heard Osama bin Laden seeking to exploit the situation there. Jan Egeland, the UN's humanitarian co-ordinator, has recently questioned how much longer the enormous humanitarian effort can be sustained, particularly when – most deplorably – humanitarian workers have themselves been attacked.

There needs to be an end to the fighting in Darfur, there needs to be a political solution, and there needs to be a bigger international presence. United Nations troops must be allowed in to strengthen the valiant work the AU has been doing on peacekeeping as soon as possible. It was of historic significance that world leaders agreed last September at the UN World Summit that both individual governments and the international community have a 'responsibility to protect'. This is something for the Government of Sudan to responsibly face.

One of the saddest statistics is that which tells us that, in recent years, around half the countries emerging from conflict have lapsed back into it again within five years. But we now have an opportunity to change this. In December, the General Assembly created a new Peacebuilding Commission – intended to ensure that countries emerging from

conflict get the help they need from the international community, when they need it. I am hopeful that in the coming weeks the Commission's Organisational Committee will be in place and its work will get underway. For those countries recovering from the ravages of conflict, this cannot happen soon enough.

There have been some other trends over the past year that I should touch on in brief. The almost unprecedented number and scale of natural disasters over the last year or so is further indication of the environmental threats facing us, not least on climate change. We need to continue looking for multilateral ways of tackling both the underlying issue and its consequences.

We have seen progress with the establishment of the new Central Emergency Response Fund at the UN – designed to ensure that the international system has the funds to respond to humanitarian crises the moment they occur. This is a vast improvement over the previous system, which had been likened to asking for funds to build a fire station and buy fire engines only after a fire had broken out. It is my fervent hope that the new Fund will also help the world to move beyond the selective solidarity it has shown in the recent past. Newsworthy crises were inundated with support whilst other equally serious tragedies went unnoticed.

A new threat over the past year has been that of Avian flu. We still do not know if the outbreak might become transmissible from person to person. But we do know, looking back to the lessons from SARS, that the only way we will tackle an outbreak is by working together. Few realise how close we came with SARS to a much wider outbreak, and how important it was that the countries affected shared information in real time through the World Health Organisation.

The other point that the Avian flu threat underlines is that in today's world, our health systems are only as good as those of the weakest amongst us. If Avian flu were to gain a foothold in a developing country without a functioning basic health system, it might be impossible to contain.

Another dramatic issue this year has been the high price of oil. Opinions vary, but there are growing signs that the current price level might not be a short-term phenomenon. There are questions asked about whether some countries' long-term reserves are as big as claimed, or can easily be exploited, whether for reasons of geology or geopolitics. Meanwhile, there is anxiety on the markets about the future reliability of supplies from countries such as Iran. These anxieties about supply have gone hand in hand with great increases in demand, particularly from China and India, which seem set to increase.

What are the implications of this for the world? I will not attempt to give a precise forecast of the macroeconomic effects. Suffice to say that there will be positives and negatives. Positives in the short-term for oil producers, and in the sense of greater incentives for work on alternative and more environmentally sound energy sources. But the negatives are deeply serious and cannot be treated lightly – neither in the developed world, nor in the non oil-producing parts of the developing world or the Middle East

such as Jordan – where sustained high oil prices pose a serious threat to the fight against poverty.

In commenting on the oil price, I have indirectly touched on the two remaining major developments over the last year that ought to be taken into account: the rapid emergence of Asia – China and India in particular – as a major economic force, and the nuclear non-proliferation issue, particularly as it manifests itself in Iran at present.

Within Asia, notwithstanding rapid growth rates in India and elsewhere, the greatest attention this year has been focused on China, where GDP growth is exceeding 10%. China's emergence is seen in many quarters as both an opportunity and a potential threat. But first and foremost, it is a human development success story, at least in aggregate economic terms. Though rural-urban inequalities are a key challenge, China is easily on track to achieve most of the MDGs by 2015. That should be celebrated.

There are of course matters of great concern related to China. In the coming year, the way China engages in the world will also be increasingly important. This will depend on many things. China has a role in engaging fairly in the world economy. Equally, the world needs to think carefully about how it responds to China. Will we resort to new protectionism in the face of everything from Chinese exports to takeover bids from Chinese business? Will we seek to work with China as a partner, bringing it fully on board the main multilateral co-operation mechanisms, or leave it to develop its own channels for co-operation?

The impact of our decisions in this area will be great. For everything from oil to non-proliferation to the environment to development to Avian flu, our relationship with China will be critical. We have a common interest in co-operation. Africa is a case in point: in the coming years, how will Chinese involvement affect development on the continent? How will it affect the current incentives for better governance and reform?

I should now also touch upon the nuclear non-proliferation issue. It is deeply unfortunate that there is no international consensus on the way forward on disarmament and non-proliferation, as witnessed by the failure of the non-proliferation meeting last May in New York and the lack of agreement in this area at the World Summit. This is paradoxical, given the importance of disarmament, non-proliferation and the effective monitoring of peaceful uses of nuclear energy for global stability, the basis of the non-proliferation treaty.

Since the non-proliferation treaty was agreed, the risk of WMD falling into the hands of terrorists has, at the very least, been one of which we have become more seriously aware. And technology has evolved, so that the step from low to high enrichment is not as difficult as it was. Missile development has also evolved dramatically. We now need a truly effective international safeguard system in which we can all have confidence.

Ensuring non-proliferation is more important than ever. The dangers of failure would be immense. The current situation in Iran is under serious discussion in the Security Council and other fora. We must do all we can to ensure that these discussions bring

results. Everything must be done, by all parties, to find a peaceful and political solution consistent with the goal of a nuclear weapons-free Middle East.

We have a stronger need than ever for Chapter 6, article 33, of the UN Charter - on the pacific settlement of disputes. How often do we deplete all other means before harsh measures are taken? Where there are threats to global peace and security, they must be addressed robustly. But a so-called 'military solution' in relation to Iran would carry huge risks for the region and the world, in terms of politics, economics and relationships between religions.

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies

Looking back, I firmly believe the state of the world in 2006 is very much an opportunity. So many of the issues facing us are global in nature, and require increasingly global solutions. Globalisation gives us both the opportunity and the necessity of working together to solve our problems, in a way which was not the case even a decade or two ago. All countries – from the biggest to the smallest – stand to gain from an international system that delivers on everything from Avian flu to non-proliferation, and from counter-terrorism to development.

We are in essence facing a test of multilateralism. The challenge is whether we have the collective will to work together, and whether the multilateral system can rise to the new challenges. Whether our leaders and peoples are willing to acknowledge that while democracy and government are largely national, the problems we face are increasingly international, and thus, good international co-operation is in the national interest.

I referred earlier to a paradox that I see recurring throughout the major issues on the world agenda. While our problems in this world of so much suspicion and mistrust are so clearly international, there is a growing tendency to look inward. This reflects in part an insecurity at home, and in part a need for greater confidence in the ability of our multilateral system to deliver results.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan saw this early on. His report 'In Larger Freedom', published last year, was designed to address this very question: how does the United Nations need to be reformed to be effective in addressing the needs of the 21st Century? Not all, but most of the package of reforms was endorsed by world leaders at their Summit last September. It has been my responsibility, within the General Assembly, to ensure that the mandate for reform our leaders gave us is carried through.

The World Summit reaffirmed the three fundamental pillars of the UN's work: development, peace and security and human rights. And it recognised that the three are increasingly interlinked. So there is an acknowledgement that security is as much about social cohesion, economic strength, and environmental balance as it is about military strength. Strength at home is an increasing element of strength abroad.

I have already spoken about development, but have thus far not touched on human rights. I wanted to save one of the real advances in multilateralism this year for the

concluding part of my remarks. It has been said that human rights are the soul of the United Nations. At the very least they are a vital pillar – without strength in human rights, the UN is weaker in the rest of its work. And it is hard to conceive of any other Organisation that would have the unique authority derived from universality to advance the cause of human rights.

As you will know, in March this year the General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to create the new Human Rights Council. Though I regret that we were unable to reach consensus, I am confident that all Member States will co-operate with the Council. It is my firm conviction that we have created a Council that will take concrete steps forward in the protection and promotion of human rights around the globe, in accordance with all that the Universal Declaration espouses.

For the first time ever, all Member States will be subject to peer review of their human rights records. There are powerful disincentives against countries with the poorest human rights records even standing for election. The establishment of the Council is forging ahead fast; my first task on returning to New York next week will be to oversee the election of members to the first Council. The new Council will meet for the first time in Geneva on 19 June.

But as you may have seen, the current headlines at the UN are not about human rights, development or peace and security but about the UN's work to reform itself. An Organisation set up in the late 1940's inevitably needs to take a close look at what it does and the way it does it. But the mistrust and suspicion in the world is not left behind by delegates as they enter UN Headquarters. It permeates the negotiations, on this as much as any issue. What seems like sensible management practice to some seems like an underhand way of advancing particular agendas to others.

The current negotiations are as important as they are difficult. But ultimately, it is Member States who will decide how the UN is reformed, not the institution itself. Here, I believe we all have a role to play in advancing an informed discussion in New York and in our capitals.

Let me end by recalling that it is imperative that in all we do we keep in mind the realities of the world. One reality is the crushing poverty and insecurity which marks the lives of so many of our fellow human beings, and takes away what the UN Charter calls the 'dignity and worth of the human person'. A second reality is that of our peoples' aspirations, expectations and dreams for the kind of world they want to see.

I also did not want to convey the impression that the United Nations is the only vehicle for effective multilateralism. There is a vital role for civil society, the private sector, parliamentarians and local authorities. And, in a marvellous piece of foresight, the authors of the UN Charter in Chapter 8 noted that 'nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters … as are appropriate for regional action.' An effective UN and effective regional organisations should be mutually reinforcing. I support and encourage the EU,

AU and others to continue taking a proactive role both within their home regions and beyond.

But ultimately, it is up to us, ‘we, the Peoples’ to determine whether and how we want the world, the United Nations and broader multilateralism to be shaped. As Dag Hammarskjöld, the legendary former Secretary-General, said in 1960: ‘we have too much in common, too great a sharing of interests and too much that we might lose together, for ourselves and succeeding generations, ever to weaken in our efforts to turn simple human values into the firm foundation on which we may live together in peace’.