



UNITY IN DIVERSITY
THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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NGO in consultative status with the United Nations

* Special Guest Speaker *

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Dear members of the United Nations Association of the United States
and of the Global Peace Foundation,
greetings and good afternoon from Europe!

I speak to you today from Vienna where the third headquarters of the United Nations is located, and I am very pleased to address your gathering under the auspices of the Long Beach chapter of UNA-USA, in California, the birthplace of the United Nations. It is impressive that, together with the Better World Campaign, UNA-USA represents the single largest civil society group in support of the United Nations worldwide.

Commitment to diversity as basis of global peace was the message that the founders of the world organization solemnly proclaimed in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations. In the name of “We the Peoples of the United Nations,” they reaffirmed the “**equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.**” The respect of diversity, implying equal recognition of each member state of the United Nations, is also embodied in the Charter’s principle of **sovereign equality**. The **unity of purpose** among the members of the United Nations can only be achieved, and preserved, if they accept each other in all their diversity – of ethnicity, cultural traditions, and political or economic systems. In 1945, after the cataclysm of World War II, this was one of the basic messages of the founders of the organization: lasting, sustainable peace requires mutual acceptance of diversity!

When the organization was founded in San Francisco, the number of member states was relatively small – 51 – compared to today’s membership of 193. Many peoples still lived under colonial rule or under the yoke of foreign domination. In the 21st century, the United Nations – as the world’s largest grouping of sovereign states – has come to embody the diversity of humankind, including the **multitude of national interests**, more than any other inter-governmental undertaking. This brings with it unique **challenges** as well as **opportunities**.

Due to the rapid progress of globalization since the end of the Cold War, each people, nation, and cultural community has become much more aware of the **differences** between civilizations, cultures, value systems, and lifestyles – simply because of constant, and inescapable, global **interconnectedness** in all fields, whether political, social or economic. The impact of communication technology and the “virtual reality” in its wake, including the New Social Media, cannot be underestimated in today’s “global village.”

The **preservation of peace** – *raison d’être* of the United Nations – will depend on how the international community deals with the ever more complex diversity of the world. In a

most basic sense, only an order of peace embodies the **unity of humankind**. In view of the Charter's founding principle of **sovereign equality** of states, no country must jeopardize this unity by using the United Nations to impose its own system or lifestyle upon the rest of the world. This also is implied in the Charter's other founding principle, namely the **non-use of force** in relations between states. To state it yet again, **unity of purpose** (in the maintenance of global peace) requires **recognition of diversity** at all levels – of state and people, internationally as well as domestically. It also necessitates **mechanisms for resolving differences** on the basis of mutual respect. This is what the Charter of the United Nations is all about.

In order for the UN to face the challenges of our global era, the composition of the organization's highest decision-making body, the Security Council, should reflect the increasing diversity of the international community. Upon its foundation, in 1945, permanent membership in the Council corresponded with the balance of power among a relatively small number of states (that was not yet fully representative of the peoples of the world). More than 75 years later, with almost all sovereign states having joined the UN, the geopolitical realities have changed. Vast areas of the globe – Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia – are not represented at the level of permanent membership. To remain relevant in the emerging multipolar world – after almost half a century of a bipolar balance of power, followed by a brief period of unipolarity – and to retain its problem-solving capacity in the face of increasingly complex security challenges, it will be essential for the United Nations to adapt its Charter and to “update,” so to speak, the list of permanent members. Because of the veto, reform will be a gargantuan task; but **inclusivity** in terms of permanent membership will be indispensable to preserve the **unity** of purpose among all its members.

Apart from the field of international security, **diversity** and **inclusivity** are of utmost importance also in the area of **cultural identity**. I would like to express the hope that the role of the **United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**, comprising, as of today, 127 nations including the United States, will be strengthened in the face of increasing tensions along cultural and ideological lines at home and abroad. The threat of armed conflict emanating from alienation between cultures should not be underestimated.

On this solemn occasion, may I also express the hope that the United States will rejoin the most important specialized agency of the United Nations in this field, namely UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – of which it was a founding member in 1946. I further hope that the US will also accede to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of 2005. Without

active participation of the United States, the international community's policies and programs for the preservation of cultural diversity at the global level will not be effective. Without active US participation, the international community's policies and programs for the preservation of cultural diversity at the global level will not ultimately be effective. I am convinced that civil society organizations such as UNA-USA can play a decisive role in that regard.

In conclusion, I wish the United Nations Association of the United States of America and the Global Peace Foundation further success in their noble mission to support the UN in the creation of a just and peaceful world!

I thank you for your attention.