Address by Dr Guido Westerwelle, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 28 September 2013

2013-09-28

-- Translation of advance text --

Mr President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Exactly 40 years ago, the two German states joined the United Nations. For us Germans this marked our full return to the community of nations. Germany supports the United Nations as the beating heart of a global order rooted in cooperation, peaceful compromise and cooperative solutions.

The world has changed dramatically since then. New centres of economic and political power are emerging. In recent years Germany has established new strategic partnerships with the new global players in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

We are speaking here today in a different setting from usual. The United Nations is undergoing renovation. The renovation of the United Nations must not be restricted merely to the buildings. The United Nations must reflect the world as it is, not as it used to be. Only then will it be fit for the challenges of our age.

A Security Council without permanent seats for Africa and Latin America does not reflect the realities of today’s world. A Security Council in which Asia, that emerging and highly populated region, is represented with only one single permanent seat does not reflect the realities of today’s world. Germany, with its partners Japan, India and Brazil, is prepared to assume greater responsibility. In essence it is a matter of strengthening the United Nations. The authority of the United Nations depends on its being representative.

We are seeking reform of the United Nations so that its power to build consensus, establish global rules and act effectively in response to crises and conflicts is demonstrably strengthened. This is a call not only to the United Nations itself, but also to each and every individual member state. Only if we are prepared to compromise and willing to act together

will we be able to make the United Nations strong. Germany remains committed to the United Nations. A strong United Nations is in Germany's interest.

Our cultural differences and diverse traditions are not going to vanish in the age of globalisation. But it is not only the world's markets that are becoming ever more closely interconnected: people's expectations, hopes and ideas are globalising too.

The developments in the Arab world have shown us that a country's stability primarily depends not on government stability, but on social stability.

The best guarantees for a society's internal cohesion are respect for individual human rights, the rule of law to overcome arbitrariness, and broad economic, social and political participation for the people.

Germany is committed to democratic change and to respect for human and civil rights not because we want to take the moral high ground, but because we have learnt from experience – the painful experience of our own history.

In Syria the people took to the streets to protest against a repressive regime. For more than two years now, the regime's response has been brutal violence which has brought countless deaths, immeasurable suffering and terrible destruction on the Syrian people and which is now jeopardising stability in the entire region.

The use of chemical weapons, ascertained by the United Nations, is a crime against civilisation. Its terrible dimensions have consequences extending far beyond Syria. All the facts available to us show that the regime is responsible for the use of the chemical weapons.

The use of chemical weapons cannot be allowed to go unpunished. This we owe not only to the victims in Syria, but also to future generations.

Those responsible for using these weapons must be called to account before the International Criminal Court. It must at last be able to begin its independent investigations.

We welcome the agreement reached in the Security Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague. These weapons must be completely destroyed in accordance with a firmly agreed timetable. Germany is prepared to provide financial and technical help to destroy these chemical weapons. A world without weapons of mass destruction will be a better world.

We must use the opportunities for a political process offered by the agreement on destroying the chemical weapons. After all, people in Syria are still being killed every day by conventional weapons. But there will be no military solution in Syria. Only a political solution will bring lasting peace to Syria.

This includes an immediate ceasefire. I am pleased that there is at last a timetable for a possible peace conference, details of which still have to be clarified even after yesterday's decision in the Security Council. Only with a substantive political process can we counter the destabilisation of the entire region.

Germany has made available over 420 million euros to date to ease the worst of the suffering of the Syrian people. But despite all the outside help, millions of Syrians are fleeing. More and more people are at acute risk of starvation, and very soon they will also be at the mercy of the cold weather. They do not have even the most basic medical care. We must seize every possibility to improve humanitarian access to the suffering population as quickly as possible. Amidst all the devastation and hatred, the United Nations and its staff are the face of compassion and, for many Syrians, the only hope. I would like expressly to pay tribute to their work and commitment.

The tragedy in Syria underlines the extraordinary importance accruing to the disarmament of weapons of mass destruction and the strengthening of the non-proliferation regimes. A world free of weapons of mass destruction is our generation's prime task for the future. Disarmament is a crucial issue for the future of humanity.

Iran must remove the international community's doubts about the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. We welcome Iran's announcement this week that it is prepared to do so. The talks with the Iranian Government were encouraging. They open up a window of opportunity. Now it is imperative that we rebuild trust. Germany is ready to conduct the negotiations in a constructive manner. However, the new words coming out of Tehran must be followed by deeds. Not at some unspecified time in the future, but right now. But I repeat: a fresh start has been made.

We welcome the great commitment shown by President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry in giving fresh impetus to the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian leadership. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas deserve our respect for their courage in embarking together on this course. They have our full support as they pursue this course towards a negotiated agreement. Only a negotiated two-state solution can reconcile the legitimate interests of the two sides.

This week in New York has been an encouraging one. I am gratified that military solutions were not to the fore, but the struggle for political and diplomatic solutions. This is the approach the international community has to stick to.

Beyond crisis diplomacy, the United Nations is the central forum for setting binding objectives for the international community. Just a few days ago the General Assembly agreed the next steps for drawing up a new Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. Germany wants to

make a contribution here with its experience of combining economic prosperity, political participation and sustainable management.

Sustainability and combating poverty are not only key social issues; they are also key foreign policy issues. In formulating the future agenda, greater attention needs to be paid to human rights protection and good governance than has been the case in the past. The new agenda must incorporate all three dimensions of sustainability and take account of economic, social and environmental aspects. With a comprehensive approach like this we can also strengthen fragile statehood in many countries and eradicate safe havens for terrorists. Social stability is the best protection against radicalisation and extremism.

German foreign policy is policy for peace. It focuses on crisis prevention. We Germans accept our responsibility for international peacekeeping. We focus on personal and social development. We focus on strengthening civil society. We want to contribute to a global process in which we learn from each other and develop joint solutions, North and South, East and West working together. Germany will continue in future to use its economic clout and full political strength to promote peace and a balancing of interests.

The digital age brings with it entirely new opportunities and challenges. We need an internet in which freedom, security and protection of privacy are appropriately reconciled. Just as we have to regulate international financial flows in order to prevent global crises, so we need binding rules and standards for global data flows. That is why Germany has submitted an initiative regarding protection of the right to privacy in the digital age to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Everyone using the internet should be able to be sure that their rights are being respected worldwide – vis-à-vis private companies as well as vis-à-vis states. Not everything that is technically possible must be allowed to happen. Not everything that is technically possible is also legitimate.

Germany remains firmly anchored in Europe. Europe is a community of shared culture, bound together by a common destiny. Close union among the nations of Europe is and will remain the response to our history and to our future in a world of change. German foreign policy is firmly embedded in European foreign policy. Europe will continue to use its clout, its influence and its resources to uphold peace and justice, to encourage development and cooperation, and to promote climate protection and disarmament throughout the world.

This is Germany’s twin obligation: a strong united Europe in the world, and a strong, effective United Nations for the world.

Thank you.

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