Federal Foreign Office (Germany) — auswaertiges-amt.de

Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly

2014-09-27

Mr President,

Colleagues,

2014 is a special year for us Europeans – a special year of commemoration.

In the summer one hundred years ago, European diplomacy failed and the world slid into the First World War.

Seventy-five years ago, Germany attacked its neighbour Poland, plunging the world into a Second World War.

Twenty-five years ago, the Berlin Wall fell, bringing an end to the world’s decades-long division into East and West.

However, merely to look back and remember would not be enough in this year of commemoration. On the contrary, we must ask ourselves: What have we learnt from this for the future?

In my view, the most important lesson learnt from this history was the establishment of the United Nations. For the United Nations embodies the world’s hope for peace. This hope derives from an idea which is as simple as it is revolutionary:

- peace thanks to the world setting itself rules, and replacing the law of force by the force of law;

- peace thanks to conflicts being resolved at the negotiating table, not on the battlefield;

- peace thanks to the world renouncing step by step the cynical logic of violence.

To this day, the United Nations provides a foundation and universality for this hope for peace. But this universality is under threat, under threat from the ghosts of the past and from new demons. In 2014 our world seems to be unravelling. Crises are coming at us thick and fast.

And because this is so, it is not enough simply to call for the United Nations. No, we need to breathe life into this call! Hope will remain but a hope, an unattainable goal, unless states are prepared to take on responsibility. The United Nations is not a forum onto which we can shrug off responsibility. The United Nations is a forum through which we assume responsibility!

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Germany, embedded in the united Europe, is prepared to take on responsibility in and with the United Nations.

First and foremost we have a responsibility to the people bearing the brunt of the suffering in the crises.

Next month Germany is hosting a conference in Berlin to mobilise urgently needed humanitarian assistance for the millions of Syrian refugees. My country will play its part, and I sincerely hope that many others will follow suit. Support is needed above all by Syria's neighbours, which are doing a tremendous job but are also under tremendous strain as a result of the huge influx of displaced persons.

The Ebola epidemic is raging in West Africa. It is bringing suffering and death to the homes of individual families. It is endangering the cohesion of entire societies. That is why we are sending humanitarian and medical assistance and setting up an airlift to the region. I am delighted that many volunteers in my country have responded to a call, saying "I want to go there to help on the spot."

Above and beyond this immediate solidarity, however, we need a long-term commitment. We need the

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's expertise and the coordinating umbrella of the United Nations, particularly in the long term as we try to strengthen states and healthcare systems. Germany will contribute to both these goals.

No, we cannot bring the dead back to life. But we may be able to prevent far too many more people dying of Ebola who ought not to be dying – if they were treated. And we must certainly make sure that the next epidemic does not have such deadly consequences as this one we are still fighting against!

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If we are to move towards the hope of peace, we need many small steps: the commitment of individuals, as well as bilateral diplomacy and regional initiatives. But none of these can replace the United Nations. Only the

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can provide a universal foundation for the hope of peace. This foundation is international law to which everyone has signed up who belongs to the community of nations in the

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That’s why I must mention the conflict in Ukraine here. Some people in this chamber may regard this as nothing more than a regional conflict in eastern Europe. But I am convinced that this view is incorrect; this conflict affects each and every one of us. Not just any state, but a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia has, with its annexation of Crimea, unilaterally changed existing borders in Europe and thus broken international law.

We had to counter this dangerous signal, because we must not allow the power of international law to be eroded from inside! We must not allow the old division between East and West to re-emerge in the United Nations.

Because so much is at stake in this conflict, not only for the people in Ukraine but also for the future of international law, Germany and its partners have taken on responsibility and committed themselves vigorously to defusing the conflict.

I am under no illusion. A political solution is still a long way off. That said, however, just a few weeks ago we were on the brink of direct military confrontation between Russian and Ukrainian armed forces. Diplomacy prevented the worst. Now the priority must be to bring about a lasting ceasefire and to arrive at a political solution, a solution based on the principles of international law and preserving the unity of Ukraine.

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But I am not only talking about Ukraine! As long as this conflict is simmering, as long as Russia and the West are in dispute over Ukraine, this threatens to paralyse the United Nations. But we need a

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Security Council that is able and willing to act in order to tackle the new and, in the long term, far more important, tasks we are facing. For the world of 2014 is plagued not only by the old ghost of division, but also by new demons.

We are all shocked at the unspeakable brutality of those terrorists who misuse the name of God in carrying out their evil deeds. And my question is this: ought we not to be particularly

worried that the preachers of hate are drawing in young people who have grown up in the midst of our own societies?

That is why this, too, is not exclusively a regional conflict, a problem in Iraq or in Syria or in Africa, where the terrorists are stamping in particular on the fundamental rights of women and girls. This barbarity is directed against every one of us, and against everything for which the United Nations stands.

Precisely for this reason, our response needs to go much further than the immediately necessary humanitarian and military response. Germany is making substantial contributions to both, including militarily. But all this must be embedded in a political alliance against the ISIS terror. My country is strongly committed to this alliance, and I very much hope in particular that the societies of the Middle East, realising that far more is at stake than just their security, will also join.

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In a world haunted both by old ghosts and by new demons, we have to be able to pursue both paths: on the one hand, we must continue steadfastly to work towards political solutions in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Syria, but at the same time we must tackle the huge tasks of the 21st century:

I am referring to the fight against climate change. Germany is contributing a billion dollars to the Green Climate Fund. And we will support our closest partner, France, on the road to a successful Paris climate summit in 2015 and, hopefully, to a global and legally binding climate convention.

I am referring to the digital age. Yes, the internet should be a global, free, open and safe space. But this is not a matter solely for government agencies or big companies. This global, free, open and safe space must be shaped by society as a whole. If we fail to act, the vast technological possibilities will sweep aside the human dimension. We need an international law for the digital world! Germany has made a start on this in the United Nations with the resolution on the right to privacy in the digital age.

And I am referring to the post-2015 agenda, because the fight against poverty begins with the following question: how do we actually create value? How do we create prosperity? This question is not only directed at a few countries in need of help. Rather, it is a call to the whole world for more sustainable economic activity. With its shift to renewable energies, Germany has set out on a path which, though not easy, is one the world must take if we want to preserve our natural resources and if the fight for scarce resources, water and arable land, is not to become the major conflict of the 21st century.

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By these huge tasks will our children judge us. They will look back, just as we are looking back at our forebears in this year of commemoration.

Having learnt from two World Wars, our forebears established the United Nations as their lesson to us. If we want to continue this lesson, if we want to master the tasks facing us, then we must further develop this institution. The United Nations is not a finished product. And perhaps it never will be. But it must evolve further, so that in all its parts, including the Security Council, it reflects the world of today.

The United Nations is worth every effort. For in it lives the world’s hope for peace and a legal order. My country will play its part to make this hope a reality – step by step.

Thank you.

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