Speech by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle at the United Nations General Assembly

2012-09-28

In his address to the

UN

General Assembly, Foreign Minister Westerwelle commented on pressing international issues.

In his address on 28 September, Westerwelle mentioned, among other things, developments in the Arab world, the Middle East peace process, the situation in Syria and the dispute about Iran’s nuclear programme. He also assured the participating politicians from around the world that Europe would find its way out of the sovereign debt crisis and remain a strong international partner. Moreover, he called on the member states to adapt the United Nations to today’s “multipolar world” and to support Security Council reform. The text of the Minister’s speech is reproduced below:

-- Check against delivery --

Mr President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Freedom and dignity, self-determination and hope of a better life – those were the driving forces behind the movement for change in the Arab world.

As we Germans know from our own bitter experience: freedom is not a gift. Freedom has to be won and constantly defended.

Freedom is more than just freedom of thought. It is freedom to express one’s own opinion. It is freedom to voice public criticism. For that reason alone, freedom is not always comfortable.

The first article of the Basic Law, Germany’s constitution, states that “Human dignity shall be inviolable.” That applies to every single individual, regardless of their origin or culture, creed or sex.

As we Germans have experienced what it is to lack freedom in the course of our own history, we will always stand by those who, wherever they are in the world, call for freedom. For freedom of opinion and for freedom of religion. For freedom of the press and for artistic freedom.

Freedom has a daughter. It is tolerance.

And freedom has a son. It is respect.

Respect for other people.

Respect for what is important to others. Respect for what is sacred to others.

Freedom therefore does not mean freedom from responsibility. Freedom always means freedom to shoulder responsibility.

We understand the many devout people who feel wounded by the shameful anti-Islam video. However, legitimate criticism and sincere indignation cannot be used to justify acts of violence or destruction.

Some would have us believe that the burning embassy buildings are proof of a clash of civilizations.

We must not allow ourselves to be deluded by such arguments.

The vast majority of people oppose violence. The people who have taken to the streets, as well as their political representatives gathered here in New York this week, have expressed this forcefully.

This is not a clash of civilizations. It is a clash within civilizations. It is also a struggle for the soul of the movement for change in the Arab world.

It is a struggle between open and closed minds, between moderates and radicals, between understanding and hate. It is a clash between those seeking peace and those prepared to resort to violence.

The extremists want to seize control of the freedom movement by inciting violence. They must not be allowed to succeed.

Germany has taken a stand in this struggle. We will continue and expand our support for people in the Arab world.

Our values and our interests compel us to take the side of those around the world who are fighting peacefully for freedom, dignity and self-determination.

Education and work, investment and growth - our offer of a transformation partnership still stands.

I will never forget the Syrian father who held out his emaciated son to me during my visit to Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. Such suffering renders us speechless, but it also impels us to act.

To this very day, the Security Council has failed to live up to its responsibility for people in Syria. The deadlock in the Security Council must not continue.

Every day, the violence perpetrated by the Bashar al Assad regime is escalating. The risk of this conflict engulfing the entire region is growing.

Together with our partners and the United Nations, we are helping the many refugees in Syria itself and in neighbouring countries.

All Syrians who want their country to have a democratic and pluralistic future based on the rule of law must work together.

We support the efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi to find a political approach.

Despite the escalating violence and despite the deadlock in the Security Council, we must not stop working on a political solution.

During the last twenty months, the Arab League has demonstrated ever more clearly its adherence to the values enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

We welcome that. We want to build on it.

At Germany’s initiative, this week the Security Council enhanced relations between the United Nations and the Arab League. This is an acknowledgement of the Arab League’s constructive and positive role.

We also pay tribute to the efforts to gain freedom in other parts of the world. As a result of the remarkable opening up process underway in Myanmar, the country is emerging from isolation and gradually leaving repression behind.

We criticize and condemn the ongoing repression in our own neighbourhood, in Belarus.

In many other Asian and African countries which have struck out in a new direction, we are supporting political transformation by providing assistance for economic and social development.

That is in the common interest of the international community.

Without development there can be no security. Without security there can be no development.

That applies to our engagement in Afghanistan, which we will continue after the withdrawal of combat troops in 2014. It also applies to the efforts to bring stability to Somalia and Yemen, to the Great Lakes region and to the countries of the Sahel.

We are very concerned by the still unresolved dispute about Iran’s nuclear programme.

Iran has still not produced evidence of the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. It has also failed to date to provide the transparency which the International Atomic Energy Agency has long since demanded. So far, the talks during the last few months have not made enough progress towards reaching a solution.

The E3+3 have put forward proposals for a substantive negotiation process.

We still await a serious response from Iran. We want a political and diplomatic solution. Time is short.

Israel’s security is at stake. Indeed, stability in the entire region is at stake. However, this is also about averting the risk of a nuclear arms race with unforeseeable consequences for international security.

I call on Iran to stop playing for time. The situation is serious.

These challenges must not lead us to lose sight of the necessity of a negotiated peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

There is a danger that the goal of a two-state solution, the only solution which can reconcile the legitimate interests of the two sides, will slip way. The two sides must build new trust. At the same time, they must refrain from doing anything that might jeopardize a two-state solution.

Germany’s foreign policy is a policy for peace. Germany's foreign policy is anchored in Europe.

Many of you are wondering whether Europe can successfully manage its sovereign debt crisis and whether it will continue to play a leading role in the world. The answer is an emphatic “yes”.

Europe has a great responsibility in the world. And Germany is aware of its responsibility for Europe.

The way out of the sovereign debt crisis is difficult. It requires spending discipline, solidarity and growth. We will continue down this road. Europe is growing closer together. Europe is

consolidating. Europe will emerge from this crisis stronger than ever before.

Europe will remain a force to be reckoned with –

as the world’s largest donor of development assistance,

as an inspiration for peaceful regional cooperation,

as a pioneer in climate action and disarmament,

as a champion of rules-based globalization and

as a driving force for United Nations reform.

My country’s peaceful unification more than twenty years ago also signified the reunification of Europe. Since then, the world has changed dramatically.

Today we find ourselves on the threshold of a multipolar world. This world with its interdependencies needs a cooperative order. It needs strong and representative institutions.

We will weaken the Security Council if we fail to adapt it to today’s world.

Together with our G4 partners India, Brazil and Japan, we are prepared to assume greater responsibility. It cannot be that Latin America and Africa have no permanent seats on the Security Council or that dynamic Asia has only one seat.

That does not reflect the realities of today’s world, and more especially it does not reflect the realities of tomorrow’s world.

The challenges are too great for us to simply accept the status quo.

The world is not only growing together. The pace of change is increasing. We are living in an age of breathtaking change. This change brings with it risks, new dangers, as well as new uncertainties.

Above all, however, this change brings with it great opportunities – especially for young people. In this changing world we need a clear compass. Our compass is freedom. The yearning for freedom is rooted in people’s hearts all over the world. They are our partners in building a better future.

Thank you.

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