

**Italian Diplomatic Academy**

**Closing Ceremony of the Academic Year 2018-19**

**“Towards the World We Want”**

**Keynote Speech**

by

**Hans Corell**

**Ambassador (ret.)**

**Former Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs  
and the Legal Counsel of the United Nations**

**Teatro Filarmonico of Verona, Italy**

**9 June 2019**

Dr. Abramo A. Chabib, Executive Director of the IDA,  
Dr. Renato Caputo, Director of the IDA Scientific Committee,  
Distinguished Members of the IDA Scientific Committee,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Fellow Students,

First of all, let me thank you warmly for inviting me to deliver the Keynote Speech at the Closing Ceremony of the Academic Year 2018-19. This is a very solemn occasion. It should be an opportunity for you to reflect on your experiences during the past year and also on the Academy's formal engagement in the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) program: the organisation of a conference entitled “Towards the World We Want”.

I congratulate you not only for your results during the past academic year but also for your engagement in the future of the world. You represent an active constituent of the young generation and you have an important role to play, not least through your advocacy.

As I understand it, members of the United Nations Academic Impact are expected to undertake one new activity each year which actively addresses at least one of ten basic principles applied by the Impact. When I saw these principles, I immediately noted the reference to the United Nations principles. In addition, there are specific references to human rights, to peace and conflict resolution, to sustainability, and to inter-cultural dialogue. These are all extremely important elements when we build our future world. What I see when I look to the future is a mandatory common denominator for attaining this future world we want, namely the rule of law. I will revert to this question later.

Let me first focus on **the United Nations**. The Organisation was established in 1945 by a generation that had experienced two world wars. We should be very careful in defending the integrity of this heritage. The UN is often criticised, and many times this criticism is legitimate. However, it is important to be sure which among the main organs of the Organisation that is criticised: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice or the Secretariat. As you know the

Trusteeship Council, the remaining main organ among the six, has fulfilled its task. At the same time it must be stressed that if the Member States of the Organisation respected its Charter, the UN would be a formidable union. I once addressed this topic under the title “Who Needs Reforming the Most – the UN or its Members?”<sup>1</sup>

I understand that an important part of your education and your participation in the United Nations Academic Impact program is **Model United Nations**. This is extremely important. I have had the privilege of speaking at the inauguration of such events both in the U.S. and in my own country. This is an excellent way of getting acquainted with the United Nations, the manner in which States act within it, and the subject matters that the UN is dealing with. It is also an excellent way of networking and making friends for the future. You never know when your paths might cross again and when you will be able to rely on things that you learnt during these processes.

I also commend your participation in Action by Students to Promote Innovation and Reform through Education (ASPIRE). This is an important tool to promote UNAI’s principles within student communities around the world.

There is constantly talk about **UN reform**. It is obvious that the UN needs reforming, as do most organisations. Reform is a continuous process that will never really come to an end. However, of particular concern with respect to the UN is that its most powerful organ, the Security Council, does not always function when the need is the greatest. An obvious example is the situation in the Middle East. The Council must act in a manner that conflicts are prevented.

A sad fact is that the use of the veto is not always legitimate. I have addressed also this question in the past.<sup>2</sup> An additional article will soon appear advocating that the Council must be reformed and lead by example.<sup>3</sup>

As students you may be interested to learn that students at Uppsala University in Sweden have started a campaign called ‘**Stop Illegitimate Vetoes**’. As it appears from their website, they have analysed the 50 vetoes cast between 1991 (when the Soviet Union became the Russian Federation) and 10 March 2019: none by France and the UK, 11 by China, 23 by the Russian Federation, and 16 by the U.S.<sup>4</sup> Their conclusion is that 48 of these vetoes are illegitimate since they do not concern the security of the members themselves.

It is absolutely crucial that the Council fulfils its main obligation under the UN Charter, namely **the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security**. Here, the Security Council must live up to its obligations with respect to responsibility to protect (R2P) and to peacekeeping in general. The concept of R2P was introduced in the UN system in September 2005 when the General Assembly, based on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Who Needs Reforming the Most – the UN or its Members? In: Nordic Journal of International Law, Vol. 76 (2007) No. 2-3 (p. 265-279), available at <http://www.havc.se/res/SelectedMaterial/20071108corellwhoneedsreforming.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Reforming the United Nations Security Council. In: Liber Amicorum Gudmundur Eiriksson. Eds. Juan Carlos Sainz-Borgo, Helga Gudmundsdottir. Gudrun D. Gudmundsdottir, Juan M. Amaya-Castro. Mihir Kanade, Yara Saab and Humphrey Sipalla. O.P. Jindal Global University (2017) (p. 309-327), available at <http://www.havc.se/res/SelectedMaterial/20170510reformingtheunsecuritycouncil.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Security Council Reform – The Council Must Lead by Example. In: Brill/Nijhoff The Max Planck Yearbook of UN Law (UNYB) (vol. 22) Forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> A Report is available at <http://stopillegitimatevetoes.org/thereport/> and a Companion at <http://stopillegitimatevetoes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Report-Companion-Revision-14.pdf>

proposal by the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change,<sup>5</sup> adopted the World Summit Outcome.<sup>6</sup> You will find R2P in paragraphs 138 and 139 in this resolution.

Let me now focus on **threats against peace and security**. As you are well aware there are many such threats. Of particular concern in this context is the growth of the world population in combination with climate change. We should not forget that when the United Nations was established in 1945 we were some 2 billion people in the world. According to the UN Population Division the current world population is 7.6 billion and is expected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050.<sup>7</sup>

It goes without saying that this enormous population growth will have extremely serious consequences for our human habitat. If we consider this population growth in combination with climate change, we must realise that we must act. The rising CO2 emissions must be addressed. Science and business must develop methods for counteracting this development. And this must be supported at the political level. There is a clear connection with international peace and security here.

I note in this context that a couple of weeks ago, on 27 May, Pope Francis had a meeting with several ministers of finance discussing the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>8</sup> and the 2015 Paris Agreement.<sup>9</sup> At this meeting the Pope said that to combat climate change the ministers have the responsibility of working to achieve the goals that their governments have adopted. My suggestion is that you read the Pope's address on this occasion if you have not already done so.<sup>10</sup>

It may be that at the turn of the next century there could be a one meter sea level rise. This would have disastrous effects on the globe and create millions of refugees. The refugees crossing the Mediterranean these days are but trickles in comparison to what will be the result of a sea level rise caused by melting glaciers and sea ice.

When you think about this, it is also important that you are aware of the situation in the polar regions. These regions are enormous areas. Around the North Pole we have the Arctic Ocean where the legal regime is the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>11</sup> On the South Pole we have the Antarctic continent, where the legal regime is the 1959 Antarctic Treaty.<sup>12</sup> The size of the sea in the North, surrounded by continents, and the continent in the South, surrounded by sea, is basically the same: 14,000,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This is an area of nearly 47 times the surface of Italy.

The melting sea ice in the North may not affect the sea level all that much, but it reduces the albedo effect – the reflection of solar radiation – of the white ice which causes the temperature to rise twice as fast in the Arctic as in the rest of the world. This also causes melting of the permafrost in large areas, entailing great problems. One effect is the release of methane, another important green-house gas which will increase global warming. And in

---

<sup>5</sup> UNGA 'A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change' (2 December 2004) UN Doc. A/59/565.

<sup>6</sup> UNGA Res 60/1 '2005 World Summit Outcome' (16 September 2005).

<sup>7</sup> UN DESA / Population Division 'World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision' (21 June 2017).

<sup>8</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/d2hhdC1pcy>.

<sup>10</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190527\\_climate-change.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco_20190527_climate-change.html).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (concluded 10 December 1982, entered into force 16 November 1994) 1833 UNTS 3.

<sup>12</sup> Antarctic Treaty (signed 1 December 1959, entered into force 23 June 1961) 402 UNTS 71.

Antarctica the glaciers on the continent contain 90 per cent of the freshwater resources of the globe. If that starts melting!

To this should be added the risk for further desertification in parts of the world, which will generate additional climate refugees.

So, we must address the climate change. But what else can we do to counter the threats against peace and security?

Let me first mention **empowerment of women**. This is one of the most central issues for the future. It may be a sensitive issue in some countries. However, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women now has 189 parties.<sup>13</sup> Compare with the UN which currently has 193 Member States.

It is obvious that in the modern world women must be allowed to participate in governance<sup>14</sup> as well as in family planning. This should be in the interest of all States. And since there is a direct correlation between the standing of the women in a society and the level of development in that society, States that are lagging behind in this respect will suffer in the long run. I have addressed this question specifically in the past.<sup>15</sup>

Let me also mention the need for **nuclear disarmament**. There is now a treaty that prohibits nuclear weapons, which is a great success.<sup>16</sup> However, a realistic assessment leads to the conclusion that it is extremely important that the nuclear powers fulfil their obligations under the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).<sup>17</sup> Only when an elimination of the nuclear weapons according to this agreement is a reality will there be a general acceptance of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

One problem in this context is that most nuclear States believe that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons undermines the legal order based on the NPT. An additional great concern is that these States have begun to modernise their nuclear arsenals or claim that they intend to do so.

I will now revert to **the rule of law** that I mentioned at the outset. When I ask myself why there are conflicts here and there around the world, I always come to the conclusion that the reason is the same: no democracy and no rule of law.

A brief summary of the concept rule of law could be made using the following four components: (1) democracy, (2) proper legislation respecting international standards in particular in the field of human rights, (3) the institutions necessary to administer this law, including impartial and independent courts, and (4) the individuals with the necessary knowledge and integrity for the proper administration of these institutions.

---

<sup>13</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981) 1249 UNTS 13.

<sup>14</sup> Note in this context Art. 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNGA Res 217 A (III) (10 December 1948).

<sup>15</sup> International Women's Day 2012 on the theme: Women in North Africa – The Arab Spring: Women in democracy processes. Address at the Historical Museum in Stockholm on 8 March 2012 available at <http://www.havc.se/res/SelectedMaterial/20120308internationalwomensday.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (adopted 7 July 2017, not yet entered into force) UN Doc. A/CONF.229/2017/8.

<sup>17</sup> Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (adopted 1 July 1968, entered into force 5 March 1970) 729 UNTS 161.

Let me stress that the rule of law is not only something in which lawyers are engaged. It is something that everyone must understand in our society. It must permeate society. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 there is in my view one goal that is a precondition for reaching all the other goals, namely Goal 16 on equal justice for all, with the targets rule of law and anti-corruption.<sup>18</sup>

In this context I would like to draw your attention to a guide for politicians on the rule of law that was published in 2012. It is some 40 pages and is now freely available on the web for downloading and printing in 25 languages.<sup>19</sup> Just google *Rule of Law – A guide for politicians* and you will find it immediately. It is also available in Italian: *Stato di diritto Una guida per i politici*.<sup>20</sup>

My advice is that you study this guide carefully and spread the message.

On 24 September 2012, a high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the rule of law at the national and international levels. The first operative paragraph in the resolution reads:

We reaffirm our solemn commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and justice, and to an international order based on the rule of law, which are indispensable foundations for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.<sup>21</sup>

It is imperative that this is taken seriously. And for this we need statesmanship. Statesmen and Stateswomen who realise that we need an international order based on the rule of law and who can look to the future with determination based on this conviction. This is where many of you will have an important role to play in the future.

Two weeks ago, on 27 May, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet visited Sweden to deliver the second Annual Lecture hosted by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Her lecture is very interesting indeed, and I recommend that you read it.<sup>22</sup> In her words of thanks the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström talked about the **importance of music for peace**. I could not agree more.

Let us therefore observe a moment of silence and listen to the final bars in my farewell gift to Kofi Annan when I retired from the United Nations in March 2004. It is a hymn composed for the great Highland Bagpipe entitled *Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Prayer for Peace*.<sup>23</sup> (The final bars of the hymn are tuned in.)

---

<sup>18</sup> There is now a group that is focussing specifically on SDG 16 called “The Pathfinders”, see <https://www.sdg16.plus/>.

<sup>19</sup> *Rule of Law – A guide for politicians*. A Guide elaborated under the auspices of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at Lund University, Sweden, and the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law (HiIL), the Netherlands, available at <http://rwi.lu.se/2017/03/rule-law-guide-politicians/>.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://rwi.lu.se/app/uploads/2014/02/Stato-di-diritto.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> *Declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the rule of law at the national and international levels*, UN Doc. A/RES/47/1\*, available at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/1).

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRI%20Lecture%20FINAL%20as%20delivered%20by%20HC.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.havc.se/BagpipesSackpipa.htm>

Kofi Annan was a truly remarkable man. Working closely with him made you understand his extraordinary capacity to strengthen the role of the United Nations and to interact with different organs and individuals to attain results.

As a matter of fact, last Monday and Tuesday we celebrated **the life and legacy of Kofi Annan** at an event in London, co-organised by Chatham House and the United Nations Association – UK. It was a very successful event at which many who had worked closely with Kofi Annan shared their impressions and experiences with the participants – all against the background of the present geopolitical situation. The result is available on the Chatham House website, and I suggest that you visit the website to find out.<sup>24</sup>

When I drew attention to SDG 16, I referred specifically to one of its targets: anti-corruption. **Corruption is one of the worst enemies of the rule of law.** I am sure that you know that there is a convention against corruption.<sup>25</sup> It entered into force on 14 December 2005, and today there are 186 parties to this convention. Here, my conclusion is that we must all lead by example. Irrespective of where you will find yourself in the future you might experience corruption. You may even be exposed to attempts to influence you through corruption. Then it is **important to stand the ground.** Looking at yourself in the mirror in the morning when putting on make-up or shaving you should ask: am I looking at a person who I can respect? It is a question of self-respect. Because if you cannot respect yourself, how can you expect others to respect you?

You will recall that I mentioned **knowledge and integrity** as a fourth condition for the rule of law. The fact that you are gathered here participating in the Italian Diplomatic Academy means that you will no doubt find yourselves in important and influential positions in the future. Therefore, let knowledge and integrity be your lodestars. And enjoy the working day! This will help you to succeed.

Fellow students! The Academic Year 2018-19 has come to an end. But the studies continue. One day you will realise: once a student – always a student! I now wish you happiness and success in the future. *Buona fortuna!*

Thank you for your attention!

---

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/our-shared-humanity-legacy-kofi-annan>

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/tools\\_and\\_publications/UN-convention-against-corruption.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/tools_and_publications/UN-convention-against-corruption.html)