

Mr. President,

I would like to offer you my congratulations and profound best wishes as you assume your important duties as President of this General Assembly of the United Nations. The wisdom and the understanding you bring to this position is particularly appropriate for these historic times. I am confident you will do great honour to the legacy left by your distinguished predecessor.

Mr. President, a few days hence the leaders of over 80 countries will gather here to discuss the pressing plight of tens of millions of innocent children around the world - the horrors of hunger and disease, the debilitating consequences of illiteracy, the abomination of abuse. The Prime Minister of Canada has the honour to co-chair that World Summit for Children which will focus our attention as never before on what this Organization must still do: construct a world order which allows all nations, all peoples, all colors and creeds to live on a planet which is peaceful, prosperous, free and just.

There is an old Haida Indian saying from Western Canada: that "We do not inherit this land from our parents; we simply borrow it from our children." That idea motivates the Children's Summit as it must this Organization.

We live in uncommon times. Never before has the opportunity for this body to exercise its intended mission been greater. And never before have the risks and challenges been so daunting.

This past year has seen the tearing down of old barriers, the disintegration of walls - walls of the mind and real walls - walls we once thought permanent.

We in the West, perhaps to an extreme, used to view the world through the prism of the Cold War. That prism determined many of our priorities and guided our actions. That prism was a prison, and it has now been shattered. The consequence has been liberation. Liberation for millions in Central and Eastern Europe who now experience democracy where they only recently dreamt. Liberation for the minds of men and women who can now turn to old problems long neglected and the new problems now before us. Liberation for the world, which is now being freed from the tensions of a European balance of terror that penetrated to the farthest corner of the globe. And liberation for this Organization where the words of the United Nations Charter can cease to be distant goals and may now become descriptions of our common action.

This past year has seen progress in many regions and on many issues.