



IX UNPO General Assembly

Opening address to the IX UNPO General Assembly

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General Secretary
Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

16 May 2008
European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium

Distinguished Guest,
Representatives of the Corps Diplomatique,
UNPO Member Delegates,
Dear friends,

We are in assembly this morning in order to adopt a serious undertaking.

Today our concern must be with the future of UNPO. UNPO should respond to this world, which is quickly changing, and respond adequately.

Therefore, we have to reform the Preamble of the Covenant, which functions as our Constitution. During the last General assembly in Taipei, we completed the reform of the Covenant. Now we should proceed in updating , and hopefully upgrading, our political common vision and direction.

For years UNPO has struggled for respect for human rights, for the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, for the right to democracy, for the protection of the environment and it has been actively promoting and acting in accordance with the principle of nonviolence, amongst others.

Now this General Assembly has the duty to consider our past and present, rediscover our essential core values, and design our common vision for the future of UNPO.

I do believe, as many of you, that democracy is a fundamental human right.
I also strongly believe that Gandhian Nonviolence is the better tool for the oppressed peoples, struggling for their rights to be respected and often struggle for their life and livelihoods.

The nonviolent civil resistance demonstrated during the last 60 years has proven to be much more effective and so it seems to be the surpassing the many forms of the use of violence in the political struggle.

I believe that self-determination is not an absolute right, as hardly any right recognized by law is absolute. The right to self-determination is neither self-executing nor a unilateral process. I am convinced, as well as may of you, that we should refer to a very broad concept of self-

determination, that, in brief, would be considered an open, flexible process which can lead to an effective autonomy, to a consistent devolution in sharing power and to one of the many different forms of federalism.

In an increasing interdependent world – as His Holiness the Dalai Lama is use to repeat – the traditional notion of sovereignty, and even the state, as a Nation has become much less important and dominant.

It is my opinion, considering the entire history and activity of UNPO, that these essential elements should constitute the back bone of our new Preamble and could represent the core of our common vision and goal.

In 1991, when the organization was founded, the UNPO Covenant was mostly centered on the right to self-determination. The world is very different now. The hope for and the dreams of an implementation of the right of self-determination are fading away. A hard, thick and brutal reality buried our expectations.

Many, in trying to exercise their right to self-determination, remain trapped and unable to find a way out. The Former United Nations Commission on Human Rights, by universal admission, failed to protect the elementary human, political and civil rights.

Violent and military aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide mark dreadfully the last part of the XX Century.

After the middle of the nineties, any chance at actively pursuing self-determination ceased. 9/11 terrorist attacks put an end even to talks on the issue. Bilateral proceedings in international politics and international organizations smash our expectations.

It seems now that in a very prudent way there is an emerging necessity of a multilateral way. New countries are quickly sourcing as a major world powers like India, China, and Brazil. The general economic and political balance is rapidly changing. In my opinion, we are moving towards new world order and we will reaching an equilibrium, but this takes a long period of transition.

There is a serious possibility that the “closed” world to UNPO and its members can become an open world.

We should prepare ourselves and UNPO should take the opportunity and gather momentum.

Now, very serious problems are menacing the world, but in particular in the areas where UNPO members are present.

For instance:

The question of climate change and the direct and indirect effects on hundreds of millions of peoples.

The transfer of population and consequent dramatic demographic changes, which are altering distinguished marks of entire countries, potentially resulting in devastating conflicts.

The extinction of languages and culture of the indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, the lack of food and drinkable water is another potential source of conflict.

I will stop here, because this list is becoming too apocalyptic.

And also because I want to speak of hope, not of resignation.

I wish to speak about a time that demands invention, innovation, imagination, and decision.

To face what it seems ineluctable.

To affirm the need for UNPO, for its small part, to build the new, the alternative.
All the peoples that are represented here are anxious to see what we will do.

We cannot fail their trust; we cannot fail, we must try.

What recently happened in Burma, China, Tibet and East Turkestan, should leave a very bitter taste in our mouths for all the violence, its victims and the tragedy.

Today, Rebiya Kadeer from East Turkestan and the Ven. U Uttara, Secretary General of the Susana Moli Monk Movement in Birma, will have the floor and tell you about their respective plights.

I want only to underline that after a pink, a yellow, and an orange revolution we today are starting a saffron revolution.

Buddhist Monks in Burma, in Vietnam and Tibet, as elsewhere, are on the frontline struggling for their peoples and are leading the movement for democracy and human rights in Asia.

That is the reason why today many are wearing the saffron ribbon: to pay tribute to and stand in solidarity with them. UNPO would like to launch a saffron ribbon international campaign in support of the struggle for freedom in Burma, in China and in Vietnam.

OK. Ok. Someone notice that the ribbon is perhaps to red...let some rain and sun to work...and it will be right.

UNPO is also starting a campaign, by means of launching an appeal which you can find at the entrance of this very room, for the ratification of the 1989 ILO Convention (no.169) on the rights of indigenous peoples as indicated in the Report on Human Rights adopted by the European Parliament thanks also to the splendid work of its Rapporteur, MEP Marco Cappato, who is here today and will have the floor later.

But we should think also to set up a campaign for the right to Autonomy, as well an International Conference on nonviolent civil resistance.

And we should see if a request for UNPO to obtain observer status at the UN, at the Economic and social Council, is still unrealistic or not.

It is enough. The full written Report of the General Secretary is some 20 pages and it is giving the right impression of the organization, its limits and potentiality, and the evidence of very good work done and the tremendous work that still remains.

Many during the years foresaw or wished the disappearance of UNPO.
After 18 years we are still alive. In a good spirit and with a strong drive.

It is this a lost cause?

It is the cause that we need.

