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PERMANENT MISSION OF UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

*Address by H.E. Mr. George W. Bush,
President of the United States of America,
at the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly,
New York, 19 September 2006*

MR. Secretary General, Madam President, distinguished delegates, and ladies and gentlemen:

I want to thank you for the privilege of speaking to this General Assembly.

Last week, America and the world marked the fifth anniversary of the attacks that filled another September morning with death and suffering. On that terrible day, extremists killed nearly 3,000 innocent people, including citizens of dozens of nations represented right here in this chamber. Since then, the enemies of humanity have continued their campaign of murder. Al Qaeda and those inspired by its extremist ideology have attacked more than two dozen nations. And recently a different group of extremists deliberately provoked a terrible conflict in Lebanon. At the start of the 21st century, it is clear that the world is engaged in a great ideological struggle, between extremists who use terror as a weapon to create fear, and moderate people who work for peace.

Five years ago, I stood at this podium and called on the community of nations to defend civilization and build a more hopeful future. This is still the great challenge of our time; it is the calling of our generation. This morning, I want to speak about the more hopeful world that is within our reach, a world beyond terror, where ordinary men and women are free to determine their own destiny, where the voices of moderation are empowered, and where the extremists are marginalized by the peaceful majority. This world can be ours if we seek it and if we work together.

The principles of this world beyond terror can be found in the very first sentence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document declares that the "equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom and justice and peace in the world." One of the authors of this document was a Lebanese diplomat named Charles Malik, who would go on to become President of this Assembly. Mr. Malik insisted that these principles apply equally to all people, of all regions, of all religions, including the men and women of the Arab world that was his home.

In the nearly six decades since that document was approved, we have seen the forces of freedom and moderation transform entire continents. Sixty years after a terrible war, Europe is now whole, free, and at peace—and Asia has seen freedom progress and hundreds of millions of people lifted out of desperate poverty. The words of the Universal Declaration are as true today as they were when they were written. As liberty flourishes, nations grow in tolerance and hope and peace. And we're seeing that bright future begin to take root in the broader Middle East.

Some of the changes in the Middle East have been dramatic, and we see the results in this chamber. Five years ago, Afghanistan was ruled by the brutal Taliban regime, and its seat in this body was contested. Now this seat is held by the freely elected government of Afghanistan, which is represented today by President Karzai. Five years ago, Iraq's seat in this body was held by a dictator who killed his citizens, invaded his neighbors, and showed his contempt for the world by defying more than a dozen U.N. Security Council resolutions. Now Iraq's seat is held by a democratic government that embodies the aspirations of the Iraq people, who's represented today by President Talabani. With these changes, more than 50 million people have been given a voice in this chamber for the first time in decades.

Some of the changes in the Middle East are happening gradually, but they are real. Algeria has held its first competitive presidential election, and the military remained neutral. The United Arab Emirates recently announced that half of the seats in its Federal National Council will be chosen by elections. Kuwait held elections in which women were allowed to vote and run for office for the first time. Citizens have voted in municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, in parliamentary elections in Jordan and Bahrain, and in multiparty presidential elections in Yemen and Egypt. These are important steps, and the governments should continue to move forward with other reforms that show they trust their people. Every nation that travels the road to freedom moves at a different pace, and the democracies they build will reflect their own culture and traditions. But the destination is the same: A free society where people live at peace with each other and at peace with the world.

Some have argued that the democratic changes we're seeing in the Middle East are destabilizing the region. This argument rests on a false assumption, that the Middle East was stable to begin with. The reality is that the stability we thought we saw in the Middle East was a mirage. For decades, millions of men and women in the region have been trapped in oppression and hopelessness. And these conditions left a generation disillusioned, and made this region a breeding ground for extremism.

Imagine what it's like to be a young person living in a country that is not moving toward reform. You're 21 years old, and while your peers in other parts of the world are casting their ballots for the first time, you are powerless to change the course of your government. While your peers in other parts of the world have received educations that prepare them for

the opportunities of a global economy, you have been fed propaganda and conspiracy theories that blame others for your country's shortcomings. And everywhere you turn, you hear extremists who tell you that you can escape your misery and regain your dignity through violence and terror and martyrdom. For many across the broader Middle East, this is the dismal choice presented every day.

Every civilized nation, including those in the Muslim world, must support those in the region who are offering a more hopeful alternative. We know that when people have a voice in their future, they are less likely to blow themselves up in suicide attacks. We know that when leaders are accountable to their people, they are more likely to seek national greatness in the achievements of their citizens, rather than in terror and conquest. So we must stand with democratic leaders and moderate reformers across the broader Middle East. We must give them voice to the hopes of decent men and women who want for their children the same things we want for ours. We must seek stability through a free and just Middle East where the extremists are marginalized by millions of citizens in control of their own destinies.

Today, I'd like to speak directly to the people across the broader Middle East: My country desires peace. Extremists in your midst spread propaganda claiming that the West is engaged in a war against Islam. This propaganda is false, and its purpose is to confuse you and justify acts of terror. We respect Islam, but we will protect our people from those who pervert Islam to sow death and destruction. Our goal is to help you build a more tolerant and hopeful society that honors people of all faiths and promote the peace.

To the people of Iraq: Nearly 12 million of you braved the car bombers and assassins last December to vote in free elections. The world saw you hold up purple ink-stained fingers, and your courage filled us with admiration. You've stood firm in the face of horrendous acts of terror and sectarian violence—and we will not abandon you in your struggle to build a free nation. America and our coalition partners will continue to stand with the democratic government you elected. We will continue to help you secure the international assistance and investment you need to create jobs and opportunity, working with the United Nations and through the International Compact with Iraq endorsed here in New York yesterday. We will continue to train those of you who stepped forward to fight the enemies of freedom. We will not yield the future of your country to terrorists and extremists. In return, your leaders must rise to the challenges your country is facing, and make difficult choices to bring security and prosperity. Working together, we will help your democracy succeed, so it can become a beacon of hope for millions in the Muslim world.

To the people of Afghanistan: Together, we overthrew the Taliban regime that brought misery into your lives and harbored terrorists who brought death to the citizens of many nations. Since then, we have watched you choose your leaders in free elections and build a democratic

government. You can be proud of these achievements. We respect your courage, and your determination to live in peace and freedom. We will continue to stand with you to defend your democratic gains. Today forces from more than 40 countries, including members of the NATO Alliance, are bravely serving side-by-side with you against the extremists who want to bring down the free government you've established. We'll help you defeat these enemies and build a free Afghanistan that will never again oppress you, or be a safe haven for terrorists.

To the people of Lebanon: Last year, you inspired the world when you came out into the streets to demand your independence from Syrian dominance. You drove Syrian forces from your country and you reestablished democracy. Since then, you have been tested by the fighting that began with Hezbollah's unprovoked attacks on Israel. Many of you have seen your homes and communities caught in crossfire. We see your suffering, and the world is helping you to rebuild your country, and helping you deal with the armed extremists who are undermining your democracy by acting as a state within a state. The United Nations has passed a good resolution that has authorized an international force, led by France and Italy, to help you restore Lebanese sovereignty over Lebanese soil. For many years, Lebanon was a model of democracy and pluralism and openness in the region—and it will be again.

To the people of Iran: The United States respects you; we your country. We admire your rich history, your vibrant culture, and your many contributions to civilization. You deserve an opportunity to determine your own future, an economy that rewards your intelligence and your talents, and a society that allows you to fulfill your tremendous potential. The greatest obstacle to this future is that your rulers have chosen to deny you liberty and to use your nation's resources to fund terrorism, and fuel extremism, and pursue nuclear weapons. The United Nations has passed a clear resolution requiring that the regime in Tehran meet its international obligations. Iran must abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions. Despite what the regime tells you, we have no objection to Iran's pursuit of a truly peaceful nuclear power program. We're working toward a diplomatic solution to this crisis. And as we do, we look to the day when you can live in freedom—and America and Iran can be good friends and close partners in the cause of peace.

To the people of Syria: Your land is home to a great people with a proud tradition of learning and commerce. Today your rulers have allowed your country to become a crossroad for terrorism. In your midst, Hamas and Hezbollah are working to destabilize the region, and your government is turning your country into a tool of Iran. This is increasing your country's isolation from the world. Your government must choose a better way forward by ending its support for terror, and living in peace with your neighbors, and opening the way to a better life for you and your families.

To the people of Darfur: You have suffered unspeakable violence, and my nation has called these atrocities what they are—genocide. For the last two years, America joined with the international community to provide emergency food aid and support for an African Union peacekeeping force. Yet your suffering continues. The world must step forward to provide additional humanitarian aid—and we must strengthen the African Union force that has done good work, but is not strong enough to protect you. The Security Council has approved a resolution that would transform the African Union force into a blue-helmeted force that is larger and more robust. To increase its strength and effectiveness, NATO nations should provide logistics and other support. The regime in Khartoum is stopping the deployment of this force. If the Sudanese government does not approve this peacekeeping force quickly, the United Nations must act. Your lives and the credibility of the United Nations is at stake. So today I'm announcing that I'm naming a Presidential Special Envoy—former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios—to lead America's efforts to resolve the outstanding disputes and help bring peace to your land.

The world must also stand up for peace in the Holy Land. I'm committed to two democratic states—Israel and Palestine—living side-by-side in peace and security. I'm committed to a Palestinian state that has territorial integrity and will live peacefully with the Jewish state of Israel. This is the vision set forth in the road map—and helping the parties reach this goal is one of the great objectives of my presidency. The Palestinian people have suffered from decades of corruption and violence and the daily humiliation of occupation. Israeli citizens have endured brutal acts of terrorism and constant fear of attack since the birth of their nation. Many brave men and women have made the commitment to peace. Yet extremists in the region are stirring up hatred and trying to prevent these moderate voices from prevailing.

This struggle is unfolding in the Palestinian territories. Earlier this year, the Palestinian people voted in a free election. The leaders of Hamas campaigned on a platform of ending corruption and improving the lives of the Palestinian people, and they prevailed. The world is waiting to see whether the Hamas government will follow through on its promises, or pursue an extremist agenda. And the world has sent a clear message to the leaders of Hamas: Serve the interests of the Palestinian people. Abandon terror, recognize Israel's right to exist, honor agreements, and work for peace.

President Abbas is committed to peace, and to his people's aspirations for a state of their own. Prime Minister Olmert is committed to peace, and has said he intends to meet with President Abbas to make real progress on the outstanding issues between them. I believe peace can be achieved, and that a democratic Palestinian state is possible. I hear from leaders in the region who want to help. I've directed Secretary of State Rice to lead a diplomatic effort to engage moderate leaders across the

region, to help the Palestinians reform their security services, and support Israeli and Palestinian leaders in their efforts to come together to resolve their differences. Prime Minister Blair has indicated that his country will work with partners in Europe to help strengthen the governing institutions of the Palestinian administration. We welcome his initiative. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Jordan and Egypt have made clear they're willing to contribute the diplomatic and financial assistance necessary to help these efforts succeed. I'm optimistic that by supporting the forces of democracy and moderation, we can help Israelis and Palestinians build a more hopeful future and achieve the peace in a Holy Land we all want.

Freedom, by its nature, cannot be imposed—it must be chosen. From Beirut to Baghdad, people are making the choice for freedom. And the nations gathered in this chamber must make a choice, as well: Will we support the moderates and reformers who are working for change across the Middle East—or will we yield the future to the terrorists and extremists? America has made its choice: We will stand with the moderates and reformers.

Recently a courageous group of Arab and Muslim intellectuals wrote me a letter. In it, they said this: "The shore of reform is the only one on which any lights appear, even though the journey demands courage and patience and perseverance." The United Nations was created to make that journey possible. Together we must support the dreams of good and decent people who are working to transform a troubled region—and by doing so, we will advance the high ideals on which this institution was founded.

Thank you for your time. God bless.