

Speech by the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown at the Ceremony to mark the 60th anniversary of the United Nations at the St Paul's Cathedral

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Your Majesty, Prime Minister, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Six decades have passed since the United Nations was born into a world devastated by war.

Never again, the people demanded.

Those attending the first UN General Assembly here in London, responding to that call, set out to find a new and better way to solve global problems, to build a new world order on the rubble of the old.

Sixty years later, the world has changed. But the need is as relevant as ever.

The Cold War has come and gone. And the number of democracies, nations, and members of the United Nations has multiplied.

Globalization has expanded opportunity.

But it also has expanded threat.

International trafficking in people, weapons and drugs.

Climate change. HIV/AIDS.

And, of course, the menace of terrorism, as this city knows.

We shall be lucky if the United Nations reached 70 without having had to confront a real threat from nuclear, chemical or biological terrorism.

So, the dangers may be new.

But the challenges of our time too can only be met by strengthening our instruments of global governance, not weakening them.

'We the peoples...' – the opening words of the UN Charter – are an expression of our common humanity and shared destiny every bit as valid today now as they were when they were first written.

The United Nations has not always lived up to the hopes embodied in its Charter.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina as elsewhere, it failed to stop the war that cost a quarter of a million lives – despite, as so often, the valiant efforts of its peace-keepers, many of them British, to whom we should also pay tribute today.

One lesson we have learned from this, is that when actions within a state so breach international law as to threaten the wider peace, then the international community has a duty, moral and practical, to step in and stop it.

No-one can doubt the need for reform of the United Nations.

But no-one can doubt either the central role it has played in the peace of today – or the role it must play if we are to secure peace for our tomorrows.

Sixty years ago, this Cathedral stood defiant and majestic, intact and enduring among the bombed out ruins all around.

Today, the values that underpin the United Nations stand defiant and enduring. It is proper to renew our faith in them; and our commitment to live up to them better – for these values will be just as necessary in the decades to come.