

ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT PREVIEWES POSSIBLE OUTCOME OF SUMMIT ON UN REFORM

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The President of the United Nations General Assembly today presented an early vision of what international consensus on development, security, human rights and UN reform might look like when world leaders gather in September to commemorate the Organization's sixtieth anniversary.

The so-called draft outcome document for the High-Level Millennium Review, set to run from 14 to 16 September 2005, was presented to a closed-door Assembly session this afternoon by President Jean Ping of Gabon.

It had been drafted following intense consultations among UN Member States in an attempt to incorporate their reactions to proposals for international action on a host of fronts outlined by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the report "In Larger Freedom," his agenda for "bold but achievable" UN reforms. That report was released in late March as a five-year update on the UN Millennium Declaration, in which world leaders pledged to build a better and safer planet for the next century.

"Member States are ready to take ambitious decisions on all fronts," Assembly President Ping said at press briefing to preview the document. There was much possibility for consensus, he added.

With regard to development, for example, he said there was general will to increase development assistance. In the area of peace and security, Member States were prepared to take collective measures, especially regarding the protection of civilian populations in cases of genocide and other war crimes.

He said that member States were also prepared to establish a peace-building Commission to maintain peace, one of the Secretary-General's structural recommendations. In other areas, there were possibilities for compromises that came close to the recommendations.

Member States had agreed, for example that today's Geneva-based Commission on Human Rights did not function to everyone's satisfaction, he said. However, many had balked at the establishment of a council-level body to replace it. The current draft instead proposed, the creation of a human-rights organ as a subsidiary of the Assembly, with the possibility of promoting it to becoming a principal organ.

The draft outcome document also expresses strong support for the Secretary-General's strategy to eradicate terrorism in all its forms. The adoption of a general counter-terrorism convention was proposed for no later than the middle of next year.

Still, little consensus was reached on the specifics of Security Council reform. Mr. Ping said that the issue had been the most contentious, "awakening great passions and fixed attitudes." He had asked the parties not to rush things, since intensive consultations would be held starting on the issue beginning on 21 June.

In many other areas, however, from poverty reduction to the illicit trade in small arms in light weapons to the role of the Secretariat and other bodies, the text proposes specific agreements.

Reacting to the draft after its release this afternoon, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called it "a valuable guidepost for advancing development, security, and human rights."

"Much is at stake," he said of the negotiations to come, "and I am confident that when world leaders meet in New York this coming September, they will agree on the most far-ranging and ambitious reforms of the United Nations in its 60-year history."