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ANGELINA JOLIE

WHAT WE STAND FOR?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3aCv8b2OfE>

Good evening. I am truly honored to be here with you tonight and thank you to the foundation for inviting me and thank you all for sharing at this moment.

We are here in memory of Sergio Vieira de Mello and the 21 other men and women, most of them UN workers, who died with him in the bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003.

We remember all those who died, to acknowledge each valuable life cut short, and the families who share, even today, in their sacrifice.

We also remember them for the power of the example they set: brave individuals from 11 different countries, working to help Iraqi people, at the direction of the United Nations Security Council, and on behalf of us all.

This is sometimes forgotten: that in serving under the UN flag they died in our names, as our representatives.

At their head was Sergio Vieira de Mello, a man of extraordinary grace and ability, as so many who knew him testify.

A man who gave 30 years to the United Nations, rising from a field officer to High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Representative to Iraq.

From Bangladesh and Bosnia to South Sudan to East Timor, he spent the majority of his career in the field, working alongside people forced from their homes by war, and assisting them with his skill as a diplomat and negotiator.

Perhaps the greatest testament to his contribution, is how much his advice would be valued today.

As the Syrian conflict enters its seventh year, as we live through the gravest refugee crisis since the founding of the United Nations, as 20 million people are on the brink of death from starvation in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and northeast Nigeria, I cannot imagine that there is anyone in the leadership of the United Nations who would not welcome the opportunity to consult Sergio, or send him into the field once more. He is truly missed, even today.

It is humbling for me to speak tonight in the presence of members of Sergio's family and his former



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colleagues.

I never knew Sergio, but I have stood before the plaque in the place where he died.

I felt profound sadness at the fact that the conflict in Iraq – the source of so much Iraqi suffering to this day - had claimed the lives of men and women whose only intention was to try and improve a desperate situation.

But I also saw clearly the value and nobility of a life spent in service of others.

Sergio was a man who never turned down an assignment, no matter how difficult and dangerous - or as others have put it, was “handed one impossible task after another”.

He was a man, to borrow the words of Thomas Paine, whose country was the world, and whose religion was to do good.

He will always remain a hero and inspiration to all who follow in his footsteps.

The UN’s work did not end there, in the rubble of the Canal Hotel, 14 years ago.

Hundreds of UN staff have served, and continue to, serve in Iraq, as they do from Afghanistan to Somalia, because the task of building peace and security can never be abandoned, no matter how bleak the situation.

My thoughts on Sergio’s life and legacy derive from my 16 years with UNHCR, the Agency he spent so much of his career serving and representing.

But I also speak as a citizen of my country – the United States.

I believe all of us who work with the UN preserve this duality. The United Nations is not a country, it is a place where we come together as nations and people to try to resolve our differences and unite in common action.

As a citizen, I find myself looking out on a global environment that seems more troubling and uncertain than at any time in my lifetime. I imagine many of you may feel the same.

We are grappling with a level of conflict and insecurity that seems to exceed our will and capabilities: with more refugees than ever before, and new wars erupting on top of existing conflicts, some already lasting decades.

We see a rising tide of nationalism, masquerading as patriotism, and the re-emergence of policies encouraging fear and hatred of others.

We see some politicians elected partly on the basis of dismissing international institutions and agreements,



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as if our countries have not benefited from cooperation, but actually been harmed by it.

We hear some leaders talking as if some of our proudest achievements are in fact our biggest liabilities – whether it is the tradition of successfully integrating refugees into our societies, or the institutions and treaties we have built rooted in laws and human rights.

We see nations that played a proud role in the founding of the International Criminal Court withdrawing from it, on the one hand, and on the other, we see arrest warrants for alleged war crimes issued but not implemented, and other crimes ignored altogether.

We see a country like South Sudan ushered by the international community into independence, then largely abandoned – not by the UN agencies and NGOs – but effectively abandoned, without the massive support they needed to make a success of sovereignty.

And we see resolutions and laws on the protection of civilians and the use of chemical weapons, for instance, flouted repeatedly, in some cases under the cover of Security Council vetoes, as in Syria.

Many of these things are not new – but taken together – and in the absence of strong international leadership, they are deeply worrying.

When we consider all this and more, as citizens, what is our answer?

Do we, as some would encourage us to think, turn our backs on the world, and hope we can wait for storms to pass?

Or do we strengthen our commitment to diplomacy and to the United Nations?

I strongly believe there is only one choice, demanded by reason as well as by conscience, which is the hard work of diplomacy and negotiation and reform of the UN.

This is not to say that that is any way an easy road. And there are reasons people feel insecure today.

The level of conflict and lack of solutions combined with the fear of terrorism; the reality that globalization has brought vast benefits to some but worsened the lot of others; the sense of a disconnect between citizens and governments, or in some countries the lack of governance; the overall feeling that for all our gains in technology and connectedness, we are less in control of forces shaping our lives – all these factors and more have contributed to a sense of a world out of balance, and there are no easy answers.

And despite the millions of people who have lifted themselves out of poverty in our lifetimes, the difference between the lives of those of us born in wealthy, democratic societies and those born into the slums and refugee camps of the world is a profound injustice. We see it and we know it to be wrong, at a simple human level. That inequality is contributing to instability, conflict and migration as well as to the sense that



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the international system serves the few at the expense of the many.

But again, what is our answer, as citizens?

Do we withdraw from the world where before we felt a responsibility to be part of solutions?

I am a proud American and I am an internationalist.

I believe anyone committed to human rights is an internationalist.

It means seeing the world with a sense of fairness and humility, and recognizing our own humanity in the struggles of others.

It stems from love of one's country, but not at the expense of others - from patriotism, but not from narrow nationalism.

It includes the view that success isn't being better or greater than others, but finding your place in a world where others succeed too.

And that a strong nation, like a strong person, helps others to rise up and be independent.

It is the spirit that made possible the creation of the UN, out of the rubble and ruin and 60 million dead of World War Two; so that even before the task of defeating Nazism was complete, that generation of wartime leaders was forging the United Nations.

If governments and leaders are not keeping that flame of internationalism alive today, then we as citizens must.

The challenge is how to restore that sense of balance and hopefulness in our countries, while not sacrificing all we have learnt about the value and necessity of internationalism.

Because a world in which we turn our back on our global responsibilities will be a world that produces greater insecurity, violence and danger for us and for our children.

This is not a clash between idealism and realism.

It is the recognition that there is no shortcut to peace and security, and no substitute for the long, painstaking effort to end conflicts, expand human rights and strengthen the rule of law.

We have to challenge the idea that the strongest leaders are those most willing to dismiss human rights on the grounds of national interest. The strongest leaders are those who are capable of pursuing both.

Having strong values and the will to act upon them doesn't weaken our borders or our militaries – it is their



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essential foundation.

None of this is to say that the UN is perfect. Of course, it is not.

I have never met a field officer who has not railed against its shortcomings, as I imagine Sergio did in his darkest moments.

He, like all of us, wanted a UN that was more decisive, less bureaucratic, and that lived up to its standards. But he never said it was pointless. He never threw in the towel.

The UN is an imperfect organization because we are imperfect. It is not separate from us.

Our decisions, particularly those made by the Security Council, have played a part in creating the landscape we are dealing with today.

We should always remember why the UN was formed, and what it is for, and take that responsibility seriously.

We have to recognize the damage we do when we undermine the UN or use it selectively - or not at all - or when we rely on aid to do the job of diplomacy, or give the UN impossible tasks and then underfund it.

For example today, there is not a single humanitarian appeal anywhere in the world that is funded by even half of what is required. In fact it is worse than that. Appeals for countries on the brink of famine today are 17%, 7%, and 5% funded, for example.

Of course, emergency aid is not the long-term answer.

No one prefers that kind of aid. Not citizens of donor countries. Not governments. Not refugees. They do not want to be dependent.

It would be far better to be able to invest all our funds in infrastructure and schools and trade and enterprises.

But let's be clear, emergency aid has to continue because many states cannot or will not protect the rights of citizens around the world.

It is what we spend in countries where we have no diplomacy or our diplomacy is not working.

Until we do better at preventing and reducing conflict, we are doomed to be in a cycle of having to help feed or shelter people when societies collapse.

As another legendary UN leader, who was also killed in the line of duty, Dag Hammerskold, said "Everything will be all right – you know when? When people, just people, stop thinking of the United Nations as a weird



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Picasso abstraction and see it as a drawing they made themselves”.

The UN can only change if governments change their policies. And if we as citizens ask our governments to do that.

It is moving, if you think about it: We are the future generations envisaged in the UN Charter.

When our grandparents resolved to “spare future generations the scourge of war”, as written in the Charter, they were thinking of us.

But as well as dreaming of our safety they also left us a responsibility.

President Roosevelt, addressing the US Congress in January 1945, six months before the end of Second World War, said this:

“In the field of foreign policy, we propose to stand together with the United Nations not for the war alone but for the victory for which the war is fought”.

He went on:

“The firm foundation can be built- and it will be built. But the continuance and assurance of a living peace must, in the long run, be the work of the people themselves.”

Today, we have to ask ourselves, are we living up to that mission?

They gave us that start. What have we done with it?

It is clear to me that we have made huge strides. But our agreements and institutions are only as strong as our will to uphold them today.

And if we do not, for whatever reason, we bequeath a darker and more unstable world to all those who come after us. It is not for this that previous generations shed blood and worked so hard on behalf of all of us.

The memory of those who came before us holds us true to our ideals.

Resting unchanging in time, they remind us of who we are and what we stand for.

They give us hope to stay in the fight, as Sergio did, until his last breath.

14 years since his death, there is a stronger need than ever before for us to stay true to the ideals and purposes of the United Nations.



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That is what I hope his memory holds us to today.

We can't all be Sergios. But I hope all of us can determine that we shall be a generation that renews its commitment to "unite our strength to maintain international peace and security", and "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."

But in the final analysis, even if we do not, even if that level of vision eludes us and we continue to simply manage rather than to try to overcome our generation's challenges, we have to keep working determinedly and patiently.

And you can be certain, as you do, that you follow the example of one of the UN's finest sons: and that to do even a little of his good, to apply ourselves to the work he left unfinished, in whatever way we can, is a worthy task for any one of us.

Thank you