



The United States and the Opening of the 64th UN General Assembly

October 1, 2009: The following talking points are intended to inform chapter leaders and members across the country on what President Obama's first visit to the General Assembly and Security Council accomplished, particularly with regard to the mutual interests of the US and the UN.

- In his speech to the General Assembly on Sept. 23, the president conveyed the US' commitment to working with UN member states. Interrupted 12 times by applause from leaders and delegates, the president's assertion of a renewed US role in the world and the UN's embracement of it are fundamental steps forward to improving America's standing in the world.
- The US raised disarmament and non-proliferation to the top of the international agenda at Obama's speech to the Security Council on Sept. 24, where he reinforced the US' role as an integral, collaborative partner in confronting global problems. The US' decision to devote its Security Council presidency to addressing these issues underscored the significance of the threat of the use of nuclear weapons and reasserted the UN as the "pivotal" forum for tackling hard security questions. This step served to define the Security Council as an authority to not only take on such thorny issues but also find solutions to them. As a result, the Council, including the permanent members Russia and China, unanimously adopted a US-drafted resolution that strengthens export controls on proliferation-related materials, among other measures to reduce global nuclear dangers.
- In meeting with 13 leaders who provide the often-ignored troops critical for UN peacekeeping operations, the US acknowledged these leaders' roles in preventing wars, monitoring peace agreements, helping to restore the rule of law and establishing democratic institutions. President Obama's remarks that America "is ready to do its part" in this capacity bolstered the image of the US in the crucial arena of UN peacekeeping efforts, backed with its recent decision to pay off its significant arrears to the UN for this purpose.
- The US offered momentum for pre-Copenhagen negotiations earlier in the week at the UN's climate change summit and specific discussions among the G20 leaders in Pittsburgh at the end of the week on climate financing and eliminating subsidies for fossil fuels. While many domestic hurdles still await the administration on global warming, the president's presence at the UN climate summit nonetheless reaffirms that the US will lead in building international consensus in support of an agreement in Copenhagen this December.
- The president's meeting with 25 sub-Saharan African leaders last week in New York also demonstrated that although "Africa's future is up to Africans," the US is eager to begin an inclusive sustained dialogue with officials from this region. The Administration also stressed that the dialogues will include civil society and private sector actors as well, and that the focus of discussions will center around creating jobs and fighting corruption.
- The president co-chaired the first summit-level session of the Friends of Democratic Pakistan group during his week in New York, working alongside Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the UK and President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan, as well as 18 other nations and six major international organizations. The event mobilized support to expand on an investment and aid strategy to stabilize a region where US interests are at stake and militants maintain an active presence.
- The Security Council meeting on sexual violence in conflict zones, which took place on Sept. 30, was chaired by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. It focused the world's attention on the use of rape as a tool of war and efforts to fight sexual brutality in conflict zones. A U.S.-sponsored resolution, unanimously adopted by the Council, calls for the appointment of a high-level UN envoy to advocate to end the "impunity" wrought on civilians in conflict zones by taking steps to prosecute perpetrators and to ensure a better flow of information from UN workers and officials in the field to the Security Council sanctions committee.