XXXIX GENERAL ASSEMBLY

REMARKS FROM
THE HEAD OF DELEGATION OF
THE PERMANENT OBSERVER COUNTRY OF

SERBIA

JUNE 1, 2009
Address to the Thirty-ninth Regular Session of the Organization of American States by H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.
San Pedro Sula, Honduras

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary-General, Dear Colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking our Honduran hosts for their excellent organization and warm hospitality. I would also like to express my deepest condolences to the victims of last Thursday’s tragic earthquake in this country and neighboring Belize.

It is my distinct privilege to participate in this dialogue. Serbia holds that the Organization of American States is a crucial actor in the promotion of regional peace and security, through a principled support for democratic values, institutions, and consensus-based solutions to the world’s problems.

It is with a great sense of pleasure that I am able to recall the historically close and friendly ties that my country has maintained with the OAS and its member-states for decades.

The Republic of Serbia is in the process of prioritizing the enhancement of our relations with the Western Hemisphere, both bilaterally and through the OAS. That is why we have committed to participating in the OAS-led election observer mission to Saint Kitts and Nevis later this year. It is also why we have decided to participate in a number of other OAS programs, including de-mining. Strengthening bridges of understanding, mutual-respect, and solidarity will serve our peoples far into the future.

This Session of the OAS is about providing for the next generation. My country fully endorses the draft San Pedro Sula Declaration. It affirms that the heightened development of values, attitudes and modes of behavior based on the respect for human life, rights and dignity, will enable us all to more effectively promote a culture of peace and non-violence, strongly supported by the rule of law and our democratic traditions.

It is to this common, more hopeful future, in which international justice will take its rightful place at the very center of our multilateral engagements, that I wish to direct the remainder of my brief remarks. For as the Honduran writer Ramon Amaya Amador once exclaimed, “all paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are.”
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are a peace-loving, vibrant European nation with a long history.

We are working hard to complete the process of reconciliation and solidify our democratic achievements—being a central pillar of regional stability.

Together with other Balkan states, Serbia will become a member of the European Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One significant challenge remains before we can fully consolidate the region’s accomplishments.

On February 17th, 2008, the ethnic-Albanian authorities of our southern province of Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from my country.

This attempt to forcibly partition Serbia has struck at the very heart of the binding principles of the international system, enumerated in the Charters of the UN and regional organizations such as the OAS—principles like the respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

We decided to respond to this ethnically-motivated attempt at secession peacefully.

For the first time in the history of the Balkans, an issue of such fundamental importance and complexity—passionately involving all at once identity, boundaries, communal rights, opposing historical narratives—was steered clear of resorting to the force of arms.

We chose a peaceful approach through international engagement.

In October 2008, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution that asked the International Court of Justice to rule on whether Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence was in accordance with international law.

The Court will take about a year to deliberate on the matter. The case of Kosovo’s attempt at secession has attracted enormous attention from all corners of the world—as the active participation before the Court of thirty-six countries in the proceedings make clear, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Venezuela.

It marks the first time ever that the Court has been asked to consider the legality of a move to partition a UN member State, in defiance of the Security Council.

Its conclusions will have far-reaching consequences for the international community as a whole. For we all know that there are dozens of Kosovo-s throughout the world, hoping for secession to be rendered an acceptable norm. In the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, anywhere
—many existing conflicts could escalate, frozen conflicts could reignite, and new ones could be instigated. Make no mistake, the very concept of the universal respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity is being considered.

My Friends,

On behalf of the Republic of Serbia, I wish to profoundly thank the vast majority of the countries represented in this room for your principled position on this issue. Your support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a UN member State, the Republic of Serbia, is truly gratifying.

I would underline how important it is for the judicial process to be allowed to run its course, free of political interference.

I therefore respectfully ask that you maintain your reservation on the Kosovo issue, while the International Court of Justice deliberates on this crucial question.

This is the only way to avoid doing any further damage to the legitimacy of the international system, and to the universality of the values we hold in common.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finding a negotiated, mutually-acceptable solution to Kosovo’s future status will require compromise, concession and good-will.

Despite the apparent impasse, I am cautiously optimistic this is the direction we’ll start heading towards soon.

But in order to succeed, your understanding remains crucial.

By continuing to support our efforts to promote a culture of non-violence through a commitment to law, you strengthen our common dedication to equitable peace and cooperation, and you reaffirm the universal right to international justice for all.

Thank you for your attention.