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SPEECH BY HSH HEREDITARY PRINCE ALOIS OF LIECHTENSTEIN

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
UN MEMBERSHIP OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to offer today some reflections on a quarter century of membership of the Principality of Liechtenstein in the United Nations. We joined the organization on 18 September 1990. Today, Liechtenstein is a proud, active and well-established member of the United Nations.

Since the very beginning, we have sought to prove that a very small member is able to make a positive contribution to multilateralism. In joining the UN, we were looking for a platform to work productively within the family of nations and to create a firm foundation for our national sovereignty. Today, I can say that our hopes have been met beyond our expectations.

UN membership was in fact not easy to achieve for us. 25 years ago, people in Liechtenstein were still under the impression of the rejection of our membership in the League of Nations. The reluctance felt and expressed by some vis-a-vis very small States was carried over into the dynamics of the Cold War, which characterized the first decades of UN history. And while today, UN membership seems a matter of course for almost any State, the history of the organization tells a different story: by far the largest number of vetoes in the Security Council was cast on questions of admission of new members.

But there was also reluctance at the national level: a considerable part of the population was worried about the costs of the membership in relation to its projected benefits. And there was hesitation to join before Switzerland, because of our close partnership in matters of foreign policy.

But in the end, the arguments of the supporters prevailed: that UN membership would strengthen the sovereignty of the country, one of the overarching goals of Liechtenstein's foreign policy. The proponents also argued that the UN was an ideal platform for exchange with other countries – something of particular importance for our very small country, which can afford only very few diplomatic missions.

Today, UN membership enjoys broad support in the Principality: a recent survey has shown that 74% of the population has a positive or very positive view of the UN, 16% a neutral view and only 10% a negative view. This strong acceptance in our population – which historically has had a regional rather than global outlook – gives us confidence that we have made sound decisions on our priorities as a UN member.

Right from the beginning, we chose to be an active member. In his very first speech to the General Assembly in 1990, Reigning Prince Hans-Adam II presented a proposal for a **UN Convention on the Self-Determination of Peoples**. His vision was that future conflicts should be decided at the ballot box and not by armed conflict – and that the effective application of international law could help us prevent internal armed conflicts in particular. The proposed mechanisms would have provided for increasing levels of self-governance for communities living within States, under international monitoring. Such an innovative application of the right of self-determination was meant to satisfy legitimate claims and grievances of communities in order to prevent unrest and violent conflict.

The proposal was subject to lively discussion, but the General Assembly was at the time not prepared to advance it further. Over two decades later, it seems worth reflecting on the value of such an approach once more – a conflict resolution mechanism of this nature continues to be highly necessary.

It may be an unusual and less than ideal beginning of membership to see one's first initiative *de facto* rejected. But we were of course aware that our proposal was uncharacteristically bold. We were therefore encouraged rather than frustrated. We continued as an active member and focused on the natural core issue for many small States: the **strengthening of international law** through the promotion of the rule of law at the international as well as the national level.

We quickly became an independent advocate of **human rights**, an overall priority of our foreign policy. Ensuring basic rights for every individual is both a necessity to honor our common humanity and a prerequisite for prospering societies. There may be an ongoing discussion on the relationship and sequencing of lasting economic prosperity on the one hand and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms on the other. But we should simply look at the relevant empirical evidence. This illustrates that the economic and social empowerment of the individual is a key ingredient of sustainable development.

The successful development of Liechtenstein is strongly grounded in the **rule of law**: accountable and effective institutions, equal access to judicial remedies and a clear and enforceable regulatory framework. We know that some of our partners have had the same experience. Together with them, we have therefore made a clear commitment to the rule of law a priority in our joint contribution to the discussions on a United Nations agenda for **sustainable development** for the next decades. Unfortunately, we have not fully succeeded in our effort to convince all of our partners. A more explicit commitment to the rule of law can only strengthen our hand in making the progress we need to achieve this year – in Addis Ababa, in Paris and of course here in New York.

A central area of our investment in the rule of law is our support for the **International Criminal Court**. International criminal justice is a relatively recent area of multilateral work. It has never been an uncontroversial or easy undertaking, and indeed much work awaits us in the future. Nevertheless, the advances of the last two decades have been remarkable – and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court stands as the lasting landmark achievement. We remain committed to making the ICC an even more effective institution, to expand its reach with a view to making it ultimately universal – and to see its political acceptance grow. For this to happen, we will need to offer constructive criticism, while avoiding ideological polemics. With the adoption of the Rome Statute we were able to make a firm commitment to end impunity for those who commit the worst crimes under international law. Now, we have the obligation to make this vision a reality. There cannot be lasting peace and security unless those who commit the crimes that undermine this very peace and security can effectively be held accountable.

Remarkably, we also have the historic opportunity to criminalize the worst forms of the illegal use of force: the nations who gathered in San Francisco 70 years ago laid the foundation by subjecting the use of force to the legal rules enshrined in the UN Charter. The **Kampala amendments** adopted in 2010 complement the Charter provisions by providing for individual criminal accountability for the crime of aggression. We are close to reaching the threshold of ratifications necessary to activate the legal regime of the ICC over this crime in 2017. I hope that as many of you as possible will join us in achieving this goal.

For better or worse, public perception of the United Nations is inseparably linked to the performance of the **Security Council**. As a Member State deeply committed to the success of this organization, we are therefore worried about our collective inability to align the composition of the Council more closely to the geopolitical realities of our times. There is a serious risk that the Security Council may in the future not be able to play its central role in conflict prevention and conflict solution around the globe. I hope that we will find a way out of the deadlock on Council reform as soon as possible.

Just like over 70 other States, Liechtenstein has never served on the Security Council. We know that our opportunities to do so will be very limited in the future, too. Against this background, we attach great importance to making the Council not only a more representative organ, but also a more transparent, more inclusive and more accountable one. For this reason, we have joined forces with some of our friends to **draft a code of conduct on voting in the Security Council**, which we hope to finalize by this fall as a contribution to the 70th anniversary of the United Nations. Such a code of conduct would be a political commitment undertaken publicly

and voluntarily by States who wish to underline their resolve to fight atrocity crimes. It would also ensure that the Council will, in the future, be better able to use the available tools to end and prevent such crimes.

These are some of the priorities we have pursued since joining the United Nations. We are doing so in the firm belief that a small State, without military or great economic power, has a genuine interest in the success of effective multilateralism. The unique strength of the United Nations is founded in its legitimacy derived from international law. The rule of law at the international level is a prerequisite for a **level playing field** and for **sovereign equality** of all States.

Striking the right **balance between effectiveness and legitimacy** in international relations is an important and delicate task. We have taken note that certain large States have moved to a *de facto* extraterritorial application of their national legislation. And organisations such as the G-20 and the OECD have developed rules and standards which they expect other countries to take on. The G-20 has certainly played a crucial role in helping to overcome a global financial crisis. But we remain concerned that standard-setting in self-selected groups will lead to international regulation that lacks legitimacy and creates difficulties for implementation in smaller states. To avoid that, Liechtenstein has joined together with other smaller countries in the Global Governance Group (3G), with the aim to establish a fruitful exchange between the wider international community and the G-20.

Regulation in small States happens much closer to the citizens, ensuring less bureaucratic rules. This is not only a benefit for small States, but also for large ones. Finally, involving small States in international regulation leads to more innovation and creativity. History has shown that some of the biggest innovations in regulation came from small States like the City States of ancient Greece or the Italian and Northern European City States of the Middle Ages.

We are deeply convinced that the vision of the drafters of the UN Charter is as relevant today as it was 70 years ago: the productive cooperation of nations large and small to tackle global challenges, on the basis of the principle of sovereign equality – and to the mutual benefit of all. This organization must therefore remain the platform where we develop global rules and standards to ensure their broadest possible international acceptance.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Our assessment of 25 years of membership is very positive: In spite of all the setbacks and difficulties we have witnessed, the United Nations has maintained its unique role. Transnational challenges such as climate change, migration and organized crime have made it even more indispensable. A successful UN is therefore in the interest of us all. Our common progress at the UN will ensure more peace and prosperity for the peoples of the world. Liechtenstein will continue to actively contribute to this end in the coming 25 years.