

Speech by Mr Gerry Finnegan, ILO Representative for Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, to mark 2008 UN Day, as American International School, Lusaka (AISL), 17 October 2008

Good morning everyone!

Girls and boys, teachers and parents of American International School of Lusaka (AISL), it is a great pleasure for me to be with you here today. Indeed, this week, I seem to be a regular visitor to the school, having been here for Parent-Teacher consultations on Wednesday, and then the P4 Talent Show last night, and once again with you all this morning. I would like to congratulate the management and staff of AISL for designating today, 17 October 2008 as "UN Day" – indeed, I understand that this is the first time that AISL has commemorated UN Day here in Zambia. Of course UN Day actually falls on next Friday, 24th October, and in Zambia that also coincides with the nation's Independence Day celebrations. So, 24th October is likely to be a very busy day anyway, but for all of you it will be a nice relaxing "holiday" – away from school and studies.

Even for the UN family in Zambia, we celebrate "our" UN Day on 7 November 2008, so we do not clash with the national day of celebrations. As you can see, by celebrating on 17th October, AISL is ahead of us all – and maybe the first place in the world to formally celebrate UN Day in the entire world!

It is also very appropriate for a school with a tradition such as the American International School to celebrate UN Day. Think about it. Think of the word "international". Many of you come from countries outside of Zambia. Many of your parents are working in UN organizations; others in international organizations, and many more in the diplomatic community, which works closely with the UN. And many are here in a business capacity. And of course, for all of the Zambian children and parents, Zambia has been an active member of the UN since 1 December 1964.

What is the United Nations, and what does it do? Last night I consulted my household's resident 12-year old expert on global affairs, and I was told "The UN helps people". That is it in a nutshell, "The UN helps people", but let me explain a bit more.

The United Nations was born on – guess what – 24th October 1945, exactly 63 years ago. It was created by 51 countries who were committed to preserving peace through international cooperation and collective security. I'm sure that for many of you, you will be aware of the significance of the year "1945" from your history and humanities studies. It was the year when, what is often referred to as the "Second World War" (1939-1945), came to an end. This fact is reflected in

the introduction or Preamble to the UN Charter. It starts with three quite famous opening words:

"We the peoples" ...

"We the peoples" of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought about untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small ...". You can hear the determination of those world leaders never to let world wars happen again.

And to some extent that have succeeded, because we are all here today, and we are the "succeeding generations".

Today, almost every country in the world belongs to the UN, and membership totals 192 countries, with Montenegro being the 192nd country to join in 2006. That means that I'll bet that for every nationality represented here today, your country is a member of the United Nations. I can only think of one exception, The Vatican, where the Pope lives. But I don't think there are many of the Pope's children at AIS!

The UN is today, still essentially a "human rights-based" organization. It has sets of Conventions aimed at securing and protecting the rights of citizens. These include:

- The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, now celebrating 60 years since its enactment in 1948;
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, ratified by Zambia earlier this year.

For more information about the UN System or UN family go to www.un.org, look at the "UN News Centre" webpages for "breaking news from the UN", and don't forget to look at the "cyberschoolbus" pages, full of information, games, lessons and exercises for students and teachers alike. There, you will find links to the different websites of various UN agencies – many of whom are fully operational here in Zambia.

On the "front page" of the UN News Centre you will discover that yesterday, 16 October, was "World Food Day" – I hope you like the T-Shirt! [Celebrations throughout the world were led by UN agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)]. And a lesser known fact is that 15th October was "World Handwashing Day", created in an effort to promote personal

hygiene and reduce the spread of deadly diseases. You will also find stories and reports on the problems of the UN trying to deliver food in war-torn Sri Lanka; Soccer stars (Zidane and Ronaldhino) to score against poverty in Morocco.

You will also find a story on “Income Gap between rich and poor is huge and growing”, by ILO – my own organization. The ILO is a specialized agency of the UN, and we are the oldest as we celebrate our 90th birthday in April 2009. Specialized agencies are just like the specialist teachers that you have here in AISL – they concentrate on one subject, but of course they are part of the bigger family of AISL teachers – and they are guided by the Principals and managed by the Board of Governors. So, AISL is a bit like the UN in that respect.

The ILO concentrates on anything to do with work and employment, including trying to make workplaces safer, and trying to bring an end to child labour.

Many of you will have heard of the MDGs or the Millennium Development Goals. In 2000, as part of the global celebrations surrounding the arrival of the new “millennium”, there was a high-level meeting of Heads of State and Government at the UN in New York. They demonstrated great determination to reduce poverty, illness and disease, and make the world a better place by the year 2015. They agreed on what are now known as the 8 Millennium Development Goals (or MDGs). They deal with poverty and hunger; education; gender equality; infant mortality; safe motherhood; killer diseases such as HIV & AIDS, malaria and TB; the environment; and global partnerships for development.

Last month, many Heads of State and Government assembled again in New York to review progress at this, the near half-way point between 2000 and 2015. According to the UN Secretary General – our BIG BOSS – Mr Ban Ki-Moon, Governments promised almost US\$16 billion and renewed their commitment to achieving the Goals by 2015.

Here in Zambia, there is an Annual MDG Progress Report, produced by the Zambian Government with support from the UN System through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Also, last Saturday at the Lusaka Showgrounds, the UN, along with the Zambian Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and many businesses, came together for a fun and sports day known as the MDG race. This day gave a lot of publicity to creating awareness and sharing information on the MDGs, as well as trying to develop partnerships to help to achieve these vitally important MDGs.

I’m sure you know the “Knock, Knock” jokes. Well, here’s a UN Knock Knock joke.

Knock knock.

Who's there?

WHO.

No, I asked the question – Who's there?

WHO – I mean W-H-O, the World Health Organization!

There are many separate agencies within the UN family, and sometimes it must sound like we have our own language, our "UN-speak" ... UNDP, UNHCR, UNIFEM, WFP, UNICEF, ILO ...

In Zambia, and elsewhere around the globe, the UN System is undergoing a lot of change and reform. We are really trying to work more closely together, and to "Deliver as One UN in Zambia". Now we have "One Leader" at the country level – the UN Resident Coordinator. This means that you are now likely to see UNICEF and ILO working together to try and end child labour. You are more likely to see WHO, UNICEF, WFP and UNFPA working together to find better ways of feeding and stopping diseases among children.

By working together and delivering as "One UN2, we really believe that this is the way to go, the way forward, and the way to serve and save more lives.

Many of you have been in airplanes. But did you know that Air Traffic the world over is safer, thanks to rules and regulations agreed on through the UN's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The disease of smallpox was eradicated from the world through a global campaign coordinated by the UN's WHO. Many of the world's refugees are fed and supported by the Office of the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR), whose offices are further down Leopards Hill Road.

The UN Secretary General, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, from Korea, is very passionate about the important role that the UN has to play in the world today. In his 2008 UN Day Speech (which at this early date I am very naughty to quote from!), Mr Ban says that "We can see more clearly than ever that the threats of the 21st Century spare no one. Climate change, the spread of disease and deadly weapons, and the scourge of terrorism all cross borders." And in this context, he continues that "The United Nations must deliver results for a safer, healthier and more prosperous world".

It is important that today, in celebrating UN Day, you think about your own futures. You think about your career choices. You think about the world you want to live in. You are the future! Not just the future for yourselves and your families, but for Zambia and for the world. You are the actors and the architects, the doctors and the diplomats, the engineers and the environmentalists, the homemakers and the hobbyists, the leaders and the layabouts, the reverends

and the writers, and the tycoons and the teachers of tomorrow. (I am sure that my alliteration has impressed P7 students and their teachers!)

You are all – each and every one of you – able to play your part in making the world a better place for all of us. I urge you to look more closely at the noble aspirations upon which the UN is founded, and which it is constantly trying to apply in this ever-changing world.

Once again, dear students, I wish to thank you and your teachers for the honour and privilege of speaking to you this morning and permitting me to contribute to your UN Day celebrations.

HAVE A GREAT MID-TERM BREAK!