Keynote Address for Moscow International Model United Nations  
April 9th 2012, Moscow, Russia.

Esteemed MIMUN Secretariat, Excellencies, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure and honor that I speak to you today at one of the most successful Model UN conferences in the world. The range of multilingual committees and topics, alongside the international appeal that brings so many delegates from across great distances to debate the issues that shape our world is truly astonishing. It is truly amazing that you are representing some 27 countries. So, congratulations to Ambassador Torkunov, president of UNA Russia and to Dr. Alexei Borisov, Secretary-General of UNA Russia as well as Vice-Chair of WFUNA’s Executive Committee and also Amb Kovrishenko, another colleague in the WFUNA and UNA family.

I believe it is interesting that while the delegates before me, are “the leaders of tomorrow”, you are already the ‘global citizens’ of today. Probably many of the delegates here decided they would take on the world’s challenges already early on, and others hopefully approach leadership as something they exercise “today”.

Within this room sits hundreds of club presidents, dozens of students at the top of their class, and countless student activists and engaged youth. So, regardless what the future holds, we are all ‘global citizens’. You have a global mindset, understanding the interconnectedness of multilateral challenges and are ready to do your share.

Together, we face challenges that may seem daunting. Indeed, the international community has seen triumphs and obstacles in the last few weeks alone. For the sake of time, today I will focus on a few issues only. Issues like the Millennium Development Goals, alongside the current challenges such as Syria- issues that transcend country borders, they are “problems without passports”: international issues that demand international cooperation. Together, they represent the important questions that should be asked by every socially conscious person.

**MDG Progress/Sustainable Development**

First a question that most have heard of, but few have truly given it its due diligence: sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals. Unfortunately, it is common to find that while most have heard of the Millennium Development Goals, very few truly understand their purpose and
status. Ask yourselves: How many development goals have we reached today? The most common response to the first question is “zero”, with the next most common being silence.

I would like to bring to your attention the silent sector of international relations that has seen huge leaps forward and often go uncelebrated, yet mark successes accomplished by thousands of global citizens. They are often seen as “slow moving” and surpassed by fast paced peace and security issues by the media and are rarely a delegate’s first choice when choosing topics to debate in Model UN.

Yet, it may surprise many of you to learn that only two years ago the Millennium Development Goal of improving of the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers was not only reached but surpassed two times over, dramatically increasing the living standard for over 200 million people. Less than two months ago, we accomplished the goal of reducing by half the number of people who did not have access to clean water years before its 2015 target, giving 89% of the world safe drinking water coverage. And, it was a week ago that the World Bank announced that the MDG of halving the amount of people living in extreme poverty, a goal many saw as an uphill battle, was reached.

Even MDGs that have not been fully reached have seen huge gains: Eastern Asia and Northern Africa have achieved gender parity in tertiary education and the mortality rate for children under five has decreased by one third since 1990 worldwide. While there are still large hurdles to overcome with the MDGs, the gains made represent global partnerships between private and public sectors, that are truly working for those who need it most and are nothing short of remarkable.

Likewise, it should not be forgotten that while many strive to end violence and war worldwide, the underlying issues causing the eruption of violence are ignored—Issues like unacceptable unemployment rates for youth, inadequate health care for young women and needless deaths in children due to highly preventable diseases, all of which are MDGs.

**Syria/Peace and Security**

With development fresh in your minds, I will shift your focus to the topic of peace and security within the international system. These are the stories most people are familiar with, the stories that shock us as we read about them in our local newspapers or see on television.

One recent and ongoing crisis is the ongoing struggle in Syria. While the United Nations has offered a peace settlement, the seriousness of the crimes against the people of Syria and the lack of responsiveness deserve further attention by you, me and the international community. These types of situations demand that we, as global citizens, think critically about the responsibility to protect. It is our responsibility to have our respective governments act in a way that makes us proud to be members of the international community, and not simply be outraged at the violence we see on the
nightly news.

The World Federation of United Nations Associations, along with multiple UNAs, have led the discussion of the role of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in a world that has seen borders become increasingly less rigid between nation states and conflicts more often occurring within states rather than between them. The norm of R2P demands that we as the international community have a responsibility to protect people in addition to individual states. This brings to forefront that former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold was vocal on regarding the topic of the tension between state sovereignty and the role of international intervention—a dialogue that is necessary and welcomed to ensure the norm of R2P is continually discussed and relevant to the ever-changing international community. However we understand it, we must not sit idly by while thousands of our fellow global citizens are being killed.

**Human Rights**

Now I ask you to step back from the issue of R2P and look at Syria from a different perspective. We must see the human element of crisis without the military and government policy lens so many delegates are quick to turn to in debate. This human element is the violation and in turn, the protection of human rights. Human rights transcend into every sector, every age and every gender. It is not simply an issue of a state’s treatment of its people, but an issue of how we, as human beings, believe our fellow human beings should be treated.

While I am not understating the seriousness of state abuses of human rights, it should not be forgotten that the most common occurrences of discrimination happen at the local level, and often go unreported. This includes favorable treatment to feed the boys in a family over their sisters and mothers in times of food shortages in some regions, and HIV positive youth being unable to participate in community gatherings.

As informed global leaders, I do not doubt that this is not the first time you have heard of these occurrences of discrimination. Likewise, I am certain that the Declaration of Human Rights is something with which most of you are very familiar. As the Declaration reaches its 64th birthday in December, it is important to note that human rights violations represent much more than human suffering; they also represent the inability of a nation to reach a true state of stability and growth.

As states and communities normalize the degrading treatment of certain groups, it not only hinders development but also serves as a threat to the peace and security of nations where human rights violations lead to violent outbreaks and in some cases, genocide. This should only further your individual commitment to human rights, as leaders who have been given equal opportunities and have been protected by rights that have allowed your families, communities and states to flourish.
How to get involved

Given this position, we, as a collective, are in a fortunate position to take advantage of the opportunities to take part and add to the progress of the issues that matter to us most. There are multiple avenues to put the talents you will most definitely showcase in the coming days in your committees into action within your home countries.

As I’m sure you are aware, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development also called Rio+20 is fast approaching. With sustainable economies and developmental practices being re-evaluated, it is in every active global citizen’s best interest to take part in the dialogue. While you may not be able to participate in Brazil in-person this June, there are multiple forums to facilitate expansive participation. WFUNA, for example, is holding a webinar series to allow members from around the world to take part in the global conversation with leading experts on the future of the green economy. You can find them on our website.

I also encourage every delegate to contact their local United Nations Association to benefit from their numerous seminars and activities that center around the UN pillars. You can meet others that share your values while expanding your knowledge, passion and action for international issues.

Conclusion

As the international system continues to grow and change, so must we with it. As informed and active global citizens some of us are naturally driven towards certain issues and themes within the international arena.

While you should always follow your passion, never forget that all of the major themes that shape our world are interconnected: each affects the growth or stagnation of the others. Just as there are people who gravitate towards peace and security issues and others who will work for the Millennium Development Goals, I hope that you come to realize that where there is no peace, there is no development, and where there are gross inequalities and discrimination, there is a lack of security.

The global system is far from perfect: indeed, there is much work to be done to ensure more coastlines are protected from overfishing, that illegal gun trade is controlled, that nuclear weapons are eliminated and so on. And yes, the United Nations itself needs to be reformed and become more effective.

Yet our achievements should never be overlooked or underrated; they are immense and are the direct result of human cooperation. In the words of Albert Einstein: “Darkness is in reality the absence of light. You cannot measure darkness. A simple ray of light can break into a world of darkness and illuminate it. How can you know how dark a certain space is? You measure the amount of light present.”
I wish you all the best of luck in the coming days as well as your future endeavors. Thank you.