

Addressing global issues

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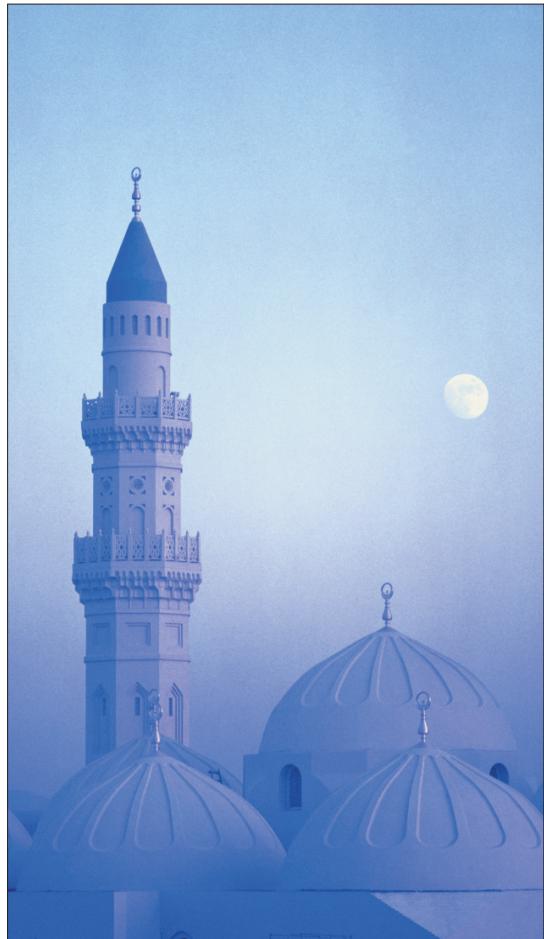


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has a bachelors degree in Economics from Princeton University. He was the deputy governor of Petromin from 1970-1 and deputy minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources in 1971. He has been Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1975.

How can the most pressing global political, economic and social issues be best addressed?

Our world is experiencing ever-accelerating political, economic and social changes, characterised by increased complexity. It is vital that we co-operate with each other now more than ever to manage the complex issues and changes with which we are faced. Balanced and healthy relations among countries, based on respect for international legitimacy and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, in a manner that guarantees justice and deepens mutual confidence and true partnership, are essential in achieving this. By promoting sound relations and understanding between countries, we will be best equipped to meet future challenges and to respond to them in a way that will be beneficial to the whole of humanity.



Quba Mosque
at dawn, Madinah,
Saudi Arabia

What is your assessment of the political and diplomatic situation in the Middle East?

Current circumstances in the Middle East are extremely dangerous. Israeli occupation of Arab lands continues to transform the whole region into multiple crisis zones accompanied by the dramatic suffering of Palestinians causing the spread of despair and extremism. One can add to this the threats to national unity and escalating civil conflicts that confront the legitimate authorities in other countries of the region.

Is a new start and perspective now required?

Clearly there is a need for a fresh start to overcome the previous hurdles and obstacles. In this regard, the Arab Peace Initiative represents a unique and historical opportunity to re-invigorate the peace process, for it provides a general framework based on international legitimacy that enables all parties to negotiate fruitfully. All Arab countries, without exception, have committed themselves to achieve peace, security, recognition and normal relations among all the countries of the region on the basis of the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories of 1967. For the first time the Arab world commits itself to an agreed solution to the refugee problem.

What is your view of the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction in the region?

We cannot ignore the serious threat to global peace and security which weapons of mass destruction continue to pose – whether they are used in wars and intimidation between states or in case they fall into the hands of terror groups. Effective non-proliferation of these destructive weapons requires abandoning double standards. We therefore emphasise the importance of making the whole Middle East, including the Gulf region, free from nuclear weapons. Israel is the only country in the region which is known to possess weapons of mass destruction but is not subjected to any form of monitoring.

While we support the rights of all countries to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, including acquiring knowledge and nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, we call all the countries of the Middle East to strictly respect their obligations under current international conventions and treaties that include specific safeguards to all nuclear programs. We hope that all countries co-

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operate positively with international efforts that aim to ensure a peaceful and swift end to nuclear disputes, and to spare the region from a futile arm race and serious environmental dangers.

To what extent is terrorism a global threat and how can this threat be mitigated?

The phenomenon of global terrorism is a threat to us all. The ongoing atrocities perpetrated by terrorists continue to test our determination to combat and counter it. As one of the main targets of terrorism, the Kingdom has repeatedly denounced all forms of terrorism and achieved tangible successes in combating it. The Kingdom joined most of the international counterterrorism agreements, as well as the Arab Agreement and the OIC Counterterrorism Agreement. The only way to pre-empt terrorist plans is to exchange intelligence and up-to-the-minute information between countries and agencies. Innovative solutions can be found to address adequately reservations regarding the sensitivity of the information and its sources.

There is no justification for any form of terrorism, but we cannot ignore that terrorism does have roots and causes which make it thrive. Achieving decisive victory against terrorism requires not only denying terrorists all financial support, but also combating extremist thought and the environment in which it prospers. Addressing the feelings of despair, anger and frustration which people feel when they are denied their legitimate rights will deprive extremists of their causes and rallying cries.

As we renew our commitment to the international campaign against terrorism, we warn against attempts by extremist forces and advocates of the clash of civilisations to exploit this campaign in a way that contradicts its objectives. It must be repeated that there is no true religion which advocates the use of terrorism. The great religions of the world all promote noble and peaceful values and we should not hold the vast majority of true believers responsible for the deviant behaviour of a very small minority in any religion. The success of the global campaign against terrorism is contingent upon our strict adherence to the rules of international law and respect of human and religious rights.

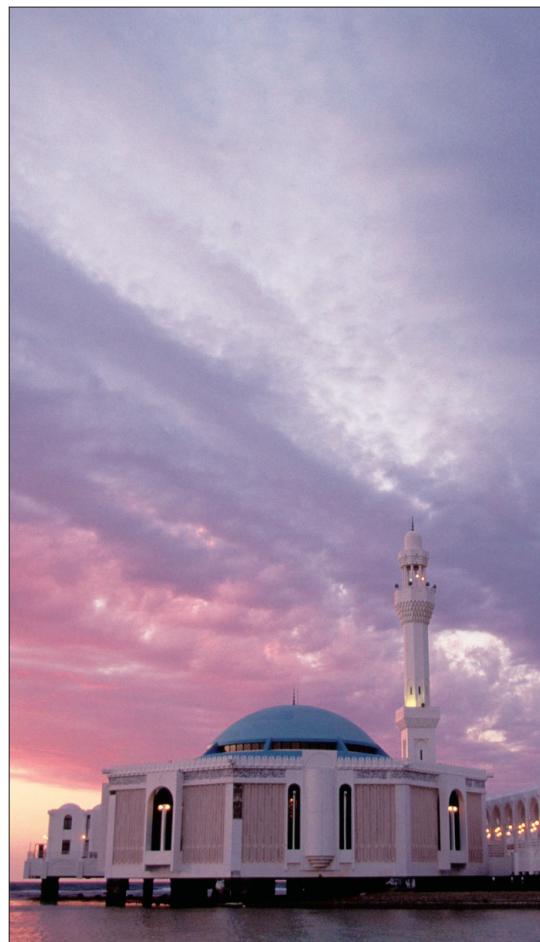
What role can the UN play in addressing these issues and what part is the Kingdom playing?

Every passing year reaffirms the great need and indispensable role of the United Nations in our World, for the host of global problems we face can only be successfully addressed within the context of multilateral co-operation which it provides. Invariably, it is the neediest who suffer the worst from the threats of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, or the spread of diseases and epidemics, or even natural disasters, making it all

the more urgent for the international community to assume its collective responsibility in giving priority to and exerting its full and concerted efforts towards effectively addressing these issues. Over the last three decades Saudi Arabia, a developing country itself, has contributed approximately 4 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in official economic aid, the highest percentage in the world. Saudi Arabia has also offered debt relief amounting to more than US\$6 billion to a number of less developed countries.

As a signatory to international agreements protecting the environment, including the Kyoto Protocol, Saudi Arabia also participates positively in all international efforts to protect the environment. The international community is hopefully able to adopt policies that combine economic growth with a better protection of the environment. The key to confronting environmental problems, including climate change, lies in continuing to develop energy efficiency technologies. International efforts in this regard must be based on the principle of shared but varied responsibility between the developed and developing countries. **F**

This article is based on statements made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the UN General Assembly



Waterfront Mosque at sunset in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia