

High time for Central Asia and Kazakhstan to have a voice in UN Security Council

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By Erlan Idrissov

No organisation has a greater global responsibility than the United Nations Security Council. The Council has the solemn task of maintaining international peace with the power to intervene if threats put it or the safety of civilian populations at risk. Its effectiveness has a huge impact on our world and the lives of millions of people.

The Council's authority stems from the UN Charter and the support of the international community. But it is strengthened when its membership is as representative as possible. Its decisions, too, benefit when drawing on differing global perspectives. It is why from the beginning, the Council's membership included not just the great powers but a rotating group of countries elected on a regional basis.

When the Council first met 70 years ago, Central Asia did not figure high on the global agenda. Its territory was largely part of the Soviet Union, one of the five permanent members. It was regarded as remote, far away from areas of importance or influence.

But neither is any longer true. The former Soviet republics are now thriving independent countries. The rise of China as an economic power and the growth of trade between Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa have put it at the centre of the global economy. Sadly, too, extremism and conflict have taken root on the fringes of the region.

So while it is understandable why no country from Central Asia has yet to sit on the UN Security Council, the continued lack of a voice from the region is in no one's interest. It is to end this oversight and, more importantly, to bring our contribution to the common good that Kazakhstan has put its name forward for election at the end of this month to the Council as a non-permanent member for 2017 and 2018.

But we are also very confident that, if elected, we will make a distinctive and positive contribution to the UN's work which goes well beyond our geography. Kazakhstan may only have been an independent country for 25 years but as Foreign Minister I am proud to say that few nations can match our support for the UN or promotion of peace, disarmament and dialogue. It is a record which underlines our strong case for election.

Soon after independence, Kazakhstan voluntarily renounced the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal. We closed the Semipalatinsk test site and worked successfully with both Russia and the USA to eliminate its infrastructure and make the material safe and secure.

Our country has worked tirelessly to encourage other countries to follow our lead. As President Nursultan Nazarbayev rightly said earlier this year when he

launched his Manifesto “The World, The 21st Century”, the cause of nuclear disarmament must be the top priority for the UN in the coming decades.

We support practical steps to bring this goal closer. We are in the forefront of the international campaign to end nuclear testing. We worked closely with our neighbours to make Central Asia a nuclear weapons-free zone.

Our track record has also made Kazakhstan a powerful advocate for wider peace and dialogue. Our influence has been strengthened because of our determination to forge good relations with countries right across the world.

The trust we have built enabled us to help mediate, for example, in the crises in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan and to play our part in breaking the deadlock of Iran’s nuclear programme. Along with our nuclear experience, it also helps explain why we have been chosen to host the International Atomic Energy Agency’s Low Enriched Uranium Bank.

We have put conflict prevention and resolution at the heart of our foreign policy. The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia – proposed by Kazakhstan at the UN – is today a multi-national forum for enhancing cooperation for promoting peace, security and stability which brings together 26 countries from Egypt and Israel to Turkey and Russia to India, Pakistan and China.

Our foreign policy and approach to the world also rests on the remarkably diverse background of our citizens. Kazakhstan is a melting pot of people of different nationalities, faiths and cultures. This can, as we have sadly seen in other countries, be a source of tension. But we have worked hard to create a society where all are valued and live in harmony.

This experience has also shaped our determination to bring cultures and other religions together internationally. We host the increasingly influential Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, attended last year by the UN Secretary-General. Last month it was at our initiative that the UN General Assembly held the Religions for Peace forum while Astana hosted the Religions against Terrorism conference in which dozens of parliamentary and faith leaders from around the world adopted a message urging believers and non-believers alike to fight the violent extremism and ideologies nurturing it.

As we have become more prosperous as a country, we have also recognised our responsibility to contribute more directly to the global good. We are actively engaged with a wide range of regional and global organisations such as the African Union, CARICOM, and SIDS (Small Island Developing States). Our international aid programme is growing strongly while we are an increasing participant in peace-keeping operations under the authority of the UNSC.

In a nutshell, Kazakhstan has been a net contributor to global security ever since our independence in 1991, and we are committed to maintaining our responsible policies in the years to come.

If we are successful in gaining a seat on the Security Council, we are determined to maintain our balanced and inclusive foreign policy. We will continue to be guided by our strong belief that only collective action can overcome global challenges.

We have made nuclear, water, food and energy security the four pillars of our campaign. Each are issues of critical global importance and require determined action. At our initiative, for example, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has already established in Astana the Islamic Organisation for Food Security to tackle food security challenges. EXPO 2017 in Astana on the theme of Future Energy provides the opportunity for sustainable energy solutions to be showcased and shared.

I recognise that we are a young country and that membership of the Security Council is a heavy responsibility. But I believe that what we have achieved and the way we have behaved over the past 25 years shows what we can offer. We hope that the election of June 28 will finally give Central Asia a voice on the Security Council and allow our country to step up its contribution to global peace and progress.

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