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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 26 November 1963, at 3 p.m.

President:

Mr. SOSA RODRIGUEZ

(Venezuela)

Tribute to the memory of Mr. John F. Kennedy,
President of the United States of America

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TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF MR. JOHN F. KENNEDY, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the thirty-fifth President of the United States, is dead. He fell at his post, in the service of his country. The treacherous act of an assassin, inspired by the hatred and fanaticism against which he fought so hard, has struck down in the flower of his age a life full of achievement and full of promise for his country and for humanity.

Not only America, but the whole world mourns his passing, for by it the whole world has lost one of those rare humans in whom energy and generosity join to produce glorious and productive activity in the service of the noblest ideals.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was a leader of peoples in the full sense of the word. His unshakeable faith in the need to reaffirm and strengthen the rights inherent in the dignity of mankind and his fight to do away with prejudice, discrimination and inequality won him the support and the love of millions of people who still suffer those injustices.

His broad vision of world problems, which enabled him to combine defence of the principles and ideals he professed with the tolerance necessary for the maintenance of peace and better understanding among peoples gained him admiration and respect among all nations.

His simplicity and his kindness as a son, husband and father permitted him to penetrate very deeply into the hearts of his countrymen and very deeply, too, beyond his country's frontiers.

The image of President Kennedy, the traces he has left behind him, can never be erased. These traces are also deeply marked in this very General Assembly hall, in which we are gathered today to pay a tribute to his memory.

(The President)

On the very day of his inauguration as President of the United States, President Kennedy pledged his support to the United Nations in these unforgettable words:

"To that world assembly of sovereign States, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support - to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective - to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak - and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run."

That pledge was kept.

Scarcely two months ago, when no one could suspect the horrible tragedy that would make his address the last he was to make in this forum, President Kennedy told us, in words which still ring in our ears:

"The world has not escaped from the darkness. The long shadows of conflict and crisis envelop us still. But we meet today in an atmosphere of rising hope, and at a moment of comparative calm. My presence here today is not a sign of crisis, but of confidence. I am not here to report a new threat to the peace or new signs of war. I have come to salute the United Nations and to show the support of the American people for your daily deliberations." (1209th meeting, page 22)

And, in concluding that magnificent address, he said:

"Two years ago I told this body that the United States had proposed and was willing to sign a limited test ban treaty. Today that treaty has been signed. It will not put an end to war. It will not remove basic conflicts. It will not secure freedom for all. But it can be a lever. An Archimedes, in explaining the principles of the lever, was said to have declared to his friends: 'Give me a place where I can stand -- and I shall move the world.'

"My fellow inhabitants of this planet: let us take our stand here in this Assembly of Nations. And let us see if we, in our own time, can move the world towards a just and lasting peace." (Ibid., page 33)

(The President)

That was the voice which has been stilled forever by the dastardly bullet of an assassin. The loss suffered by the people of the United States is undoubtedly felt by the whole world; it is certainly a grievous loss for the United Nations.

President Kennedy has been snatched away from us at a crucial moment in history, at a moment when the impact of his brave policy for peace and better understanding among peoples was beginning to yield fruit. The best tribute to his memory is to continue to fight for those objectives.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy is no longer with us. His mortal remains are at rest in Arlington Cemetery next to so many other heroes who have fallen in the service of their great American country. But his noble and generous soul has surely found eternal bliss and his spirit will live on in the hearts of all who love freedom and respect the dignity of man.

I now invite the General Assembly to stand and observe a minute of silent prayer in memory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the late President of the United States.

The representatives stood in silence.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): At this solemn meeting called in memory of President Kennedy, I propose to invite the following speakers to address the General Assembly: the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly, the Chairman of the Main Committees and, finally, the Past Presidents of the General Assembly who are present with us today. Before giving the floor to these speakers, I should like to express my deep appreciation to all representatives for the co-operation they have extended to the President in organizing this solemn meeting of the General Assembly. The speakers to whom I shall now give the floor have all been elected to the posts they hold by the General Assembly as a whole. The Past Presidents have also been elected by the whole Assembly at the sessions over which they presided. I am sure, therefore, that these speakers will express the feelings of all Member Governments and of the peoples of the whole world in their tributes to the memory of President Kennedy.

I now call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Today we are gathered in this Assembly of 111 Member Governments to pay solemn tribute to the memory of a martyr. I feel bound to participate in this occasion not only on my own behalf, but also on behalf of the entire Secretariat.

On 20 September 1963, John F. Kennedy, President of the United States of America, addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations. He said, inter alia:

"...we meet today in an atmosphere of rising hope, and at a moment of comparative calm. My presence here today is not a sign of crisis but of confidence. ... I have come to salute the United Nations and to show the support of the American people for your daily deliberations."
(1209th meeting, page 22)

Exactly nine weeks later, President Kennedy fell a victim to an assassin's bullet, and all of us at the United Nations felt that we had lost a friend, not only a friend of the Organization, not only a friend of peace, but a friend of man.

I recall with equal vividness a time some two years and two months ago when the United Nations was plunged in gloom because of the sudden death of its Secretary-General. At that time President Kennedy made a special appearance before the General Assembly of the United Nations, and in the course of his address he said:

"So let us here resolve that Dag Hammarskjold did not live -- or die -- in vain. Let us call a truce to terror. Let us invoke the blessings of peace. And, as we build an international capacity to keep peace, let us join in dismantling the national capacity to wage war."
(1013th meeting, pages 55 and 56)

Although we all know that man is born under sentence of death with but an indefinite reprieve, death is a tragedy whenever it comes. It is human to feel sorrow at the passing away of anyone dear to us, even when death comes as a merciful release from chronic suffering and pain. But when a young and dynamic leader of a great country, with his brilliant promise only half fulfilled, is felled in the prime of life by an utterly incomprehensible and senseless act, the loss is not only a loss to the bereaved family,

(The Secretary-General)

whose head he was, nor even the country over whose destiny he presided with rare ability and distinction as head of state. It is a loss suffered by the entire world, by all humanity, for the late President embodied a rare and quite remarkable combination of intellect and courage, of vigour and compassion, of devotion to the arts and sciences, all focused on serving his basic concern for the well-being of all mankind.

It is a strange irony that President Kennedy, like President Lincoln -- and I note that some have already begun to speak of Kennedy as a younger Lincoln, both being dedicated to the paths of peace and reconciliation -- should have come to a violent end at the hands of assassins. I have the feeling that President Kennedy was sincerely seeking to carry forward to fulfilment the monumental task which began in this country a hundred years ago.

Throughout his public career President Kennedy sought to reduce tension, to uphold the law and to discourage violence whether in word or deed. On a recent occasion he observed: "And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity, for in the final analysis our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this same planet, we all breathe the same air, we all cherish our children's future and we are all mortal."

President Kennedy was mortal like the rest of us. Not so his place in history, where he will live as a great leader who sought peace at home and abroad and gave his life as a true martyr in the service of his country and of all mankind.

Let us all here and now draw inspiration from his example, and let us resolve that he did not live, or die, in vain. Let us call a truce to terror. Let us invoke the blessings of peace.

Mr. TARABANOV (Bulgaria) (Vice-President of the General Assembly) (interpretation from French): Mr. President, Honourable Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen: On 22 November 1963, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was foully assassinated by the hand of a criminal. The tragic death of the President of the United States has deeply moved the entire world. It was a hard blow against all those who cherish peace and international co-operation.

The delegation of the People's Republic of Bulgaria would like to express its most sincere condolences and offer its deepest sympathy to Mrs. Kennedy, to the bereaved family, and also to the people, the Government and the delegation of the United States of America.

I also express the deepest sympathy and condolences on behalf of other delegations of socialist countries that will not be speaking at this meeting.

The feelings created in my country by this criminal act were expressed in the telegram sent to the new President of the United States, Mr. Lyndon B. Johnson, by the President of the Presidium of the National Assembly of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, Dimitar Ganev, and the President of the Council of Ministers, Todor Zhivkov:

"It is with profound regret that we have heard the news of the sudden and tragic death of the President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

"In the minds of all those attached to the cause of peace, John Kennedy will remain an eminent statesman whose presidency was marked by important steps towards the relaxation of international tension.

"On behalf of the Presidium of the National Assembly of the Government of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, and personally, we beg you to accept our sincerest condolences."

Although still young, President Kennedy was a political figure of great experience and of deep realism. He understood full well the development of the international situation and the ardent hope of peoples to eliminate the dangers of war and to live in peace. This was made manifest in many of his speeches, and particularly in that of 10 June 1963 to the students of the American University.

Recently important measures have been taken in international affairs which have permitted an improved atmosphere to prevail.

(Mr. Tarabanov, Bulgaria)

The Moscow Treaty on the partial prohibition of nuclear weapon tests was signed, commitments were assumed not to put nuclear weapons into orbit, and a declaration was prepared on the legal principles for the peaceful uses of outer space, and this is about to be adopted by the General Assembly. But just at the time when, thanks to the efforts of the peace-loving peoples of the world, a better international atmosphere was created in the fields of international co-operation and the maintenance of peace, the hand of the assassin struck. At this moment when we pay tribute to the memory of President Kennedy, the delegation of the People's Republic of Bulgaria expresses the hope that the efforts to meet these whole-hearted desires of the peoples will be continued, both within our Organization and through already established contacts.

Mr. BINDZI (Cameroon) (Vice-President of the General Assembly)
(interpretation from French): It was on Friday at 20.14 hours local time, that is, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon New York time that the news of the assassination of President Kennedy was received in Yaoundé, our capital. Immediately, the President of the Republic, together with several members of the Government, went in person to express to the United States Ambassador the grief and the sympathy of the Government and the people of the Cameroon to the American people. Simultaneously, he sent two telegrams of heart-felt condolences to Mrs. Kennedy and the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson. At the same time, the President sent a special mission to be present at the funeral, led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

At the same time, in New York my delegation presented to the Permanent Mission of the United States at the United Nations its own condolences.

Therefore, we would like simply to limit ourselves to joining in the funeral eulogy uttered by you, Mr. President, in memory of President Kennedy. Now that he has passed into history, he does not belong only to the United States, he belongs to the world.

(Mr. Bindzi, Cameroon)

We mourn the man, but we deplore above all the brutal, tragic and horrendous manner in which he took leave of us. We can almost hear him from beyond the grave paraphrasing Napoleon at St. Helena, "Assassinated, I am dying before my time and my body has already been returned to the earth". Yes, before his time, before he was able to complete his policy, and it is because of this that the entire earth mourns his death.

President Kennedy was a glorious fighter in the most noble wars of mankind for peace among nations, for racial equality here in the United States and in the world, for the emancipation of peoples and for understanding among men. Victor Hugo has said, "Memory grows when the man falls". Far from having taken you from our affection and admiration, the unjust fate that befell you, on the contrary, made you immortal. You will be counted among the most beloved and glorious heroes of our time.

Allow me to end with a brief prayer.

During this year, oh God, you have taken from the community of men two men who by their qualities and their rank carried out a constant watch over the peace of the world which is now menaced, Pope John XXIII and President Kennedy. Accept them as sacrifices on the altar of your never-ending mercy. Let the noble ideals of peace and fraternity which prompted their very being inspire all those entrusted with the fate of our poor mankind. Amen.

Mr. LIU (China) (Vice President of the General Assembly): We meet here today to pay our last tributes to a great American, a great President of a great nation and a great world statesman. President Kennedy came into his high office at a time when his country and the world were beset by momentous problems. He faced those problems with calmness, wisdom and unflinching courage. In the three brief years of his presidency he made decisions which unmistakably influenced the course of history. He lighted beacon fires which will burn brightly in the years to come.

(Mr. Liu, China)

President Kennedy was a man of vision. He had faith in the United Nations. Twice he came to this Assembly hall in the quest for peace. His noble and stirring words cannot be easily forgotten. When he came the first time to our midst on 25 September 1961, Dag Hammarskjold had died only a few days before. On that occasion, President Kennedy said:

"The problem is not the death of one man -- the problem is the life of this Organization. It will either grow to meet the challenges of our age, or it will be gone with the wind, without influence, without force, without respect. Were we to let it die -- to enfeeble its vigour -- to cripple its powers -- we would condemn our future." (1013th meeting, paragraph 39)

These are words that have a particular meaning for all of us in the United Nations. Now the man who uttered these memorable words at the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjold has himself passed into eternity. He himself died a martyr in the cause of humanity. The sense of loss is all the more poignantly felt because his young and vigorous life came to an abrupt close when he had still so much more to contribute to the future of mankind. President Chiang Kai-shek was voicing the feelings of the entire Chinese people when he said that the free world had lost an inspiring leader. While this is an occasion of deep sorrow it should also be an occasion for renewed dedication. Let us rededicate ourselves to the task of strengthening this world Organization in pursuit of the goals of which President Kennedy spoke so movingly from this rostrum only two months ago. Let his monument be the establishment of a world order in which peace, justice and freedom shall prevail.

Mr. ROSSIDES (Cyprus) (Vice-President of the General Assembly):

On behalf of my President, the Government of Cyprus and my delegation, I wish to convey to Mrs. Kennedy and the other members of the bereaved family and to the American nation our deep condolences on the tragic death of President Kennedy. The great sorrow that has fallen upon the American people has deeply moved the people of Cyprus, and our hearts go out in sympathy not only to the family but also to the nation that is tragically bereaved.

The peoples of the world join together with the American people in one common and intense feeling: grief, profound and universal, at the imponderable world loss from the death of President Kennedy. Humanity, undivided, mourns. It mourns for the great President and the great man who was eminently an apostle of peace and freedom in the world. For John Kennedy, in the brief but brilliant spell of his enlightened leadership of the American nation, won the conscience of mankind the world over. Amid the growing dangers of nuclear extinction, he became a universal symbol of hope for survival and peace. The broad vision and endeavour of his basic policy of peace came out not only in the inspiration of his words, but also in the wisdom of his actions. The treaty banning nuclear tests has been a first great achievement of that policy, to be followed by others on the long road to world order and peace.

As we look back on the events preceding his death, our minds traverse the astonishingly long distance President Kennedy covered in a short time to turn the world from a dangerous path of war and catastrophe towards saner relations among nations. From the anxious days of the last session of the General Assembly, when the Cuban crisis was looming threateningly on the horizon, up to his death, the great departed President laboured to give a new direction and new hope to the world. The thread has been interrupted. The physical life of John Kennedy has come to a tragic and abrupt end. But his spirit cannot be slain or eclipsed. It will live forever in the hearts and in the minds of men in all lands, everywhere. The torch of freedom and peace he so firmly held in his hands will not go out or fade. Sanctified by martyrdom and sacrifice, its flame will spread and grow and, to use his inaugural words, its glow can truly light the world.

(Mr. Rossides, Cyprus)

It must become a conviction and a creed for the abolition of violence, nationally and internationally. His word from the time and place of his death must travel the four corners of the earth and bring out that conviction.

A decisive move has to be made forward in the transition of humanity from the concept of force and arbitrariness to that of reason and law, and those higher standards in human and international relations that are now compellingly demanded by the achievements of science in a nuclear age, demanded by the very need of survival of the human race. Rational thinking can point in no other direction. As the late, lamented President said in his historic speech last June at the American University, "I speak of peace as the necessary, rational end of rational men". And he called upon statesmen to labour "not towards a strategy of annihilation, but towards a strategy of peace".

In consistent sequence of pronouncements and deeds, President Kennedy, in addressing the General Assembly on 20 September and in referring to the test ban treaty, said:

"...if we fail to make the most of this moment and this momentum, ...if this pause in the cold war merely leads to its renewal and not its end, then the indictment of posterity will rightly point its finger at us all". (1209th meeting, page 22)

The shaming indictment of posterity will rightly point its finger at us all if we do not fulfil our duty to carry forward the legacy of President Kennedy. Continuing that great address to the General Assembly, he said:

"So let us not rest all our hopes on parchment and on paper -- let us strive to build peace...in the hearts and minds of all our people".
(1209th meeting, page 33)

This is the challenge. This is the supreme legacy that President Kennedy left the world and this world Organization. For, parallel to his dedication to the American nation, that great statesman was no less concerned with the interest of humanity as a whole, shaping his policies in the wise and enlightened patriotism of our age. In this sense he was a strong supporter of the development of the United Nations as an evolving and effective instrument of peace and freedom in the world.

(Mr. Rossides, Cyprus)

We are gathered here to pay tribute to this outstanding leader of the world, to his moral strength and courage, to his intellectual vision and his noble statesmanship, which have made of him the pride of his people and the hope of the world. The ocean of sorrow that has engulfed us shall not become a barren thing of negativeness; it must be turned into a positive force, dynamic and united, to build the edifice of peace which he sought to erect.

The best memorial to the late President is for us to resolve here and now to work with the same dedication and consistency for retaining and broadening the areas of co-operation in an objective approach to world problems and in a spirit of allegiance to humanity, so that enduring peace may come in a world of law and justice. When that happy day comes and generations look back to the men who made it possible, the name of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, thirty-fifth President of the United States, apostle and martyr in the cause of peace and human progress, will be recalled with gratitude, with admiration and with infinite love.

Mr. ALVAREZ VIDAURRE (El Salvador) (Vice-President of the General Assembly) (interpretation from Spanish): Deeply shocked at the tragic loss of the President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, I rise to the rostrum to express the feelings of solidarity with the American people at this moment of consternation and sorrow that has plunged not only the United States but the world into mourning.

I must also express our repudiation of the odious crime that cut off the great friend of Latin America who, with his Alliance for Progress, was endeavoring to lead welfare and social justice to our lands.

The life of President Kennedy, and that of the great heroes and apostles, was dedicated to sacrifice. He shouldered his fate with the courage of the man who knows that in his hands he carries the world-wide solution, surrounded though it be with dangers. So we can say here that in dying, President Kennedy has risen to immortality, that his great and noble figure, together with that of Abraham Lincoln, will be the greatest example offered by history to future generations.

We cherish the hope that this crime, sterile in itself may be fruitful in that it may urge men of goodwill who truly wish to see the three great ideals imbuing the life of President Kennedy brought to fruition: peace, freedom and the welfare of the world.

Expressing the feelings of all Latin American people, and especially that of the people and the Government of El Salvador, I wish to offer condolences to the new President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, to Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy and her children, to the family of the late President Kennedy, to Ambassador Adlai Stevenson and to the entire American people.

Mr. SEYDCUX (France) (Vice-President of the General Assembly)

(interpretation from French): All those who were present at the United Nations last Friday when the horrible news spread, will never forget that moment. In the silence which immediately ensued -- that silence which accompanies great events -- it seemed as if the life of this House were suspended. Disbelief, then stupefaction, and consternation were painted on all faces. Everyone, whatever his native country or his rank, experienced the same emotion. One had the feeling that our community instinctively tightened around our American friends. This emotion soon became that of the whole world. A man, a young man, a Head of State, the President of the United States of America, one of the great leaders of our times, had just fallen under the bullets of an assassin.

Thus, the thread of a most brilliant career was abruptly broken. Destiny, until that tragic instant, had showered its gifts on John Fitzgerald Kennedy: all the talents which enable to assume the highest positions with ease, were his. Endowed with an exceptional intelligence, he fulfilled the enormous responsibilities he had undertaken with all the courage, all the sense of duty which he had already evinced during the war, with all the generosity of his nature, with complete devotion to the noblest ideals of American democracy, having served, until he drew his last breath, the cause of liberty and the dignity of man. He will remain forever a living symbol.

If it is during a time of affliction that one's friends can be numbered, the great nation whose destiny this man ruled for three years, must feel today that they are countless: the presence at the ceremonies held yesterday in Washington of so many men entrusted with the highest responsibilities in their respective countries, illustrates both the decisive role played by the United States in world affairs and the feelings of esteem, respect and admiration which surrounded their President everywhere. All my compatriots for whom the visit in Paris of Mr. and Mrs. John Kennedy remains a bright memory, turn toward the people of the United States, who have always been our friends. We wish them to know that their sadness is our sadness, their trial our

(Mr. Seydoux, France)

trial, their mourning our mourning. We also share their steadfast faith in the future despite the heavy loss they must bear, and steadfast is our confidence in their great destiny.

Grieved as if it were a personal loss by the shattering of this family whose happy image seemed to belong to everyone, we share, with the deepest sympathy, the sorrow of Mrs. Kennedy. May she find solace in the universal solicitude which surrounds her. We are sure that her children, like all American youth, will always be inspired by the example set forth by this great President who, in the words of General de Gaulle, died like a soldier, under fire, in the line of duty and in the service of his country.

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