



Adlai Stevenson

United Nations General Assembly Address on the Death of John F. Kennedy



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Mr. President, my dear colleagues:

My privilege in this sad hour is to convey to you, Mr. President, to you, Mr. Secretary General, and to you, the assembled delegates of the world community, a profound gratitude of the people of my country for what has been done and for what has been said here today. Our grief is the more bearable because it is so widely and so genuinely shared. And for this we can only say, simply, but from the depths of our full hearts, thank you.

President Kennedy was so contemporary a man, so involved in our world, so immersed in our times, so responsive to its challenges, so intense a participant in the great events and the great decisions of our day, that he seemed the very symbol of the -- of the vitality and the exuberance that is the essence of life itself.

Never once did he lose his way in the maze. Never once did he falter in the storm of spears. Never once was he intimidated. Like the ancient Prophets, he loved the People enough to warn them of their errors; and the man who loves his country best will hold it to its highest standards.

He made us proud to be Americans.



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And so it is that after four sorrowful days, we still can hardly grasp the macabre reality that the world has been robbed of this vibrant presence by an isolated act conceived in estranged recesses of the human mind.

We shall not soon forget the late President's striving ambition for his own country, his concept of a permanently dynamic society spreading abundance to the last corner of this land, and extending justice, tolerance, and dignity to all of its citizens alike.

For we shall not soon forget that as the leader of a great nation he met and mastered his responsibility to wield great power with great restraint. "Our national strength matters," he said just a few weeks ago, "but the spirit which informs and controls out strength matters just as much."¹

We shall not soon forget that he held fast to the vision of a world in which the peace is secure, in which inevitable conflicts are reconciled by pacific means in which nations devote their energies to the welfare of all of their citizens, and in which the vast and colorful diversity of human society can flourish in our restless, competitive search for a better society.

We shall not soon forget that by word and by deed he gave proof of profound confidence in the present value and the future promise of this great organization, the United Nations.

And we shall never forget these ambitions, these visions, these convictions that so inspired this remarkable young man and so quickened the quality and the tempo of our times in these fleeting past three years.

And our grief is compounded by the bitter irony that he who gave his all to contain violence lost is all to violence.

Now he's gone. Today we mourn him. Tomorrow and tomorrow we shall miss him. And so we shall never know how different the world might have been had fate permitted this blazing talent to live and labor longer at man's unfinished agenda for peace and progress for all.

Yet for the rest of us life goes on. Our agenda remains unfinished. Minutes after his spirit departed, Lyndon B. Johnson took his oath of allegiance to the permanent institutions of this country, institutions which outlast violence and outlive men. These hours of mourning are, then, but a pause in a process; not a break in purpose or in policy.

President Johnson has directed me to affirm to this Assembly that there will be no Johnson policy toward the United Nations any more than there was a Kennedy policy. There was and is only a United States policy, and that, too, outlasts violence and outlives men.



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As long ago as 1948, President Johnson told an American audience that "our long- term and sustained foreign policy must include full support of the United Nations." And now on his behalf, and I repeat to you that my government will, as it has over the years, support every practical move to add to the capacity of the United Nations to keep the peace, and to aid new nations to reach the stage of self-sustaining growth.

The foreign policy of this government will continue to be, as to the troubling issues of today and tomorrow, to work for agreement where agreement is possible, and to negotiate with patience and persistence until agreement is possible. President Johnson is determined that the better feeling of these past few months shall not be lost; rather, that it must be increased. In that spirit, we shall not falter on the stony path to peace.

Finally let me say that John Kennedy never believed that he or any man was indispensable, as several speakers have reminded us here this afternoon. Of Dag Hammarskjold's death he said, "The problem is not the death of one man; the problem is the life of this organization." But he did believe, passionately, that peace and justice are indispensable. And he believed, as he told this Assembly in 1951, that in the development of this organization lives the only true alternative to war.

So, my friends, we shall honor him in the best way that lies open to us, and the way that he would want it to be: by getting on with the everlasting search for peace and justice for which all mankind is praying.

Thank you.

¹ John F. Kennedy: Remarks at Amherst College (26 October 1963)