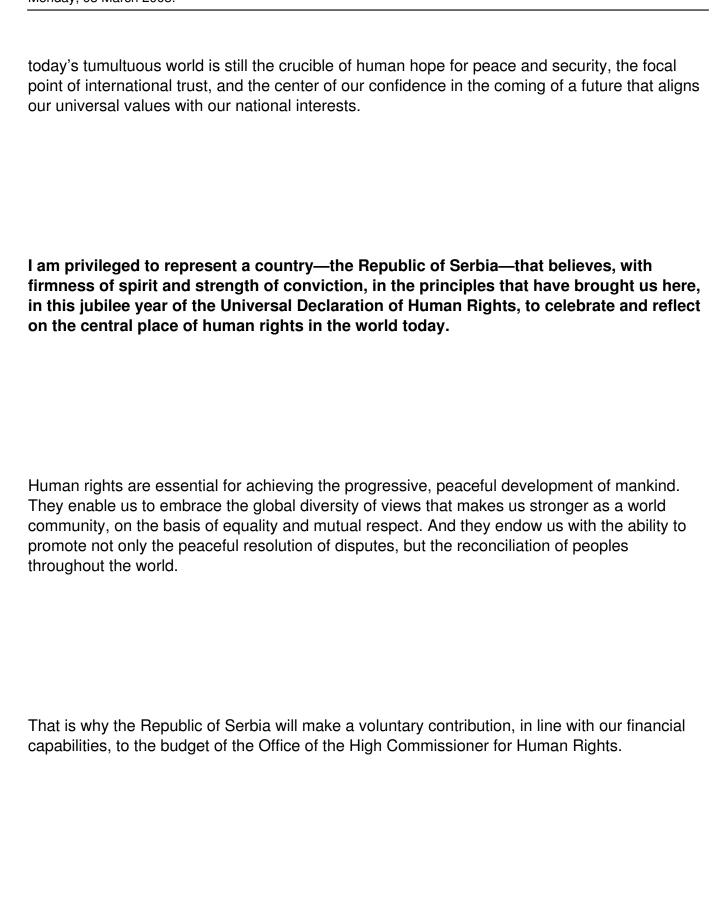
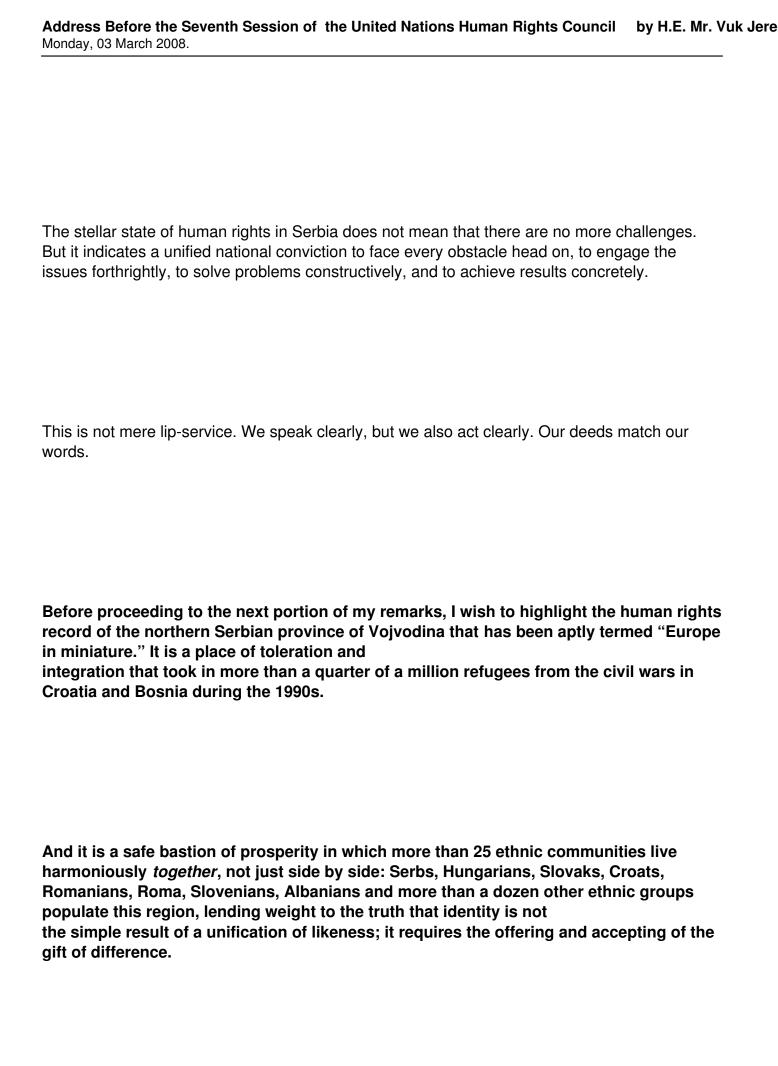
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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Respected High Commissioner Arbour,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
I am honored to address this esteemed body of the United Nations system—the system that in



Address Before the Seventh Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council by H.E. Mr. Vuk Jere Monday, 03 March 2008.
Excellencies,
The struggle to instill a sense of respect and obligation on all states and all individuals to promote human rights throughout the world stands at the very peak of mankind's 20 th century achievements. It is our duty to ourselves as human beings to continue to nobly strive to improve our record in the 21 st
century. And to re-dedicate ourselves, as members of the human family, to the respect for human rights with a determined, committed steadfastness of purpose.
To do anything else would be to deny the judgment of humanity that says, the world is, on the whole, a better place today than it has ever been before, full of the possibility that comes with a secure knowledge that our destiny is inexorably tied to one another's.
As a sign of our bedrock commitment to the respect for, and advancement of, human rights throughout the world, the Republic of Serbia has declared itself a candidate for the Human Rights Council for the period of 2008 to 2011, to be decided by a vote in the General Assembly in May of this year.
I would like to take this opportunity to express that, should Serbia be elected to the Council, we would dedicate ourselves to contribute to strengthening even further the Council's effectiveness, with a particular focus on enhancing the respect for human rights in an ever more complex and

confidently believe will be a positive report on her September 2007 visit to my country.



That is why I am proud of Serbia's dedication to press forward our promotion of cultural diversity , the handmaiden of human rights protection. We believe diversity to be a source of strength, and we embrace the view that individual cultures genuinely prosper and progress when they come into contact with other s.
But all is not well on the human rights front in the Republic of Serbia.
Standing in stark contrast to the record of those areas covered under the direct jurisdiction of our Government institutions, the state of human rights in our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, currently under United Nations administration, is dismal.
Ladies and Gentlemen,



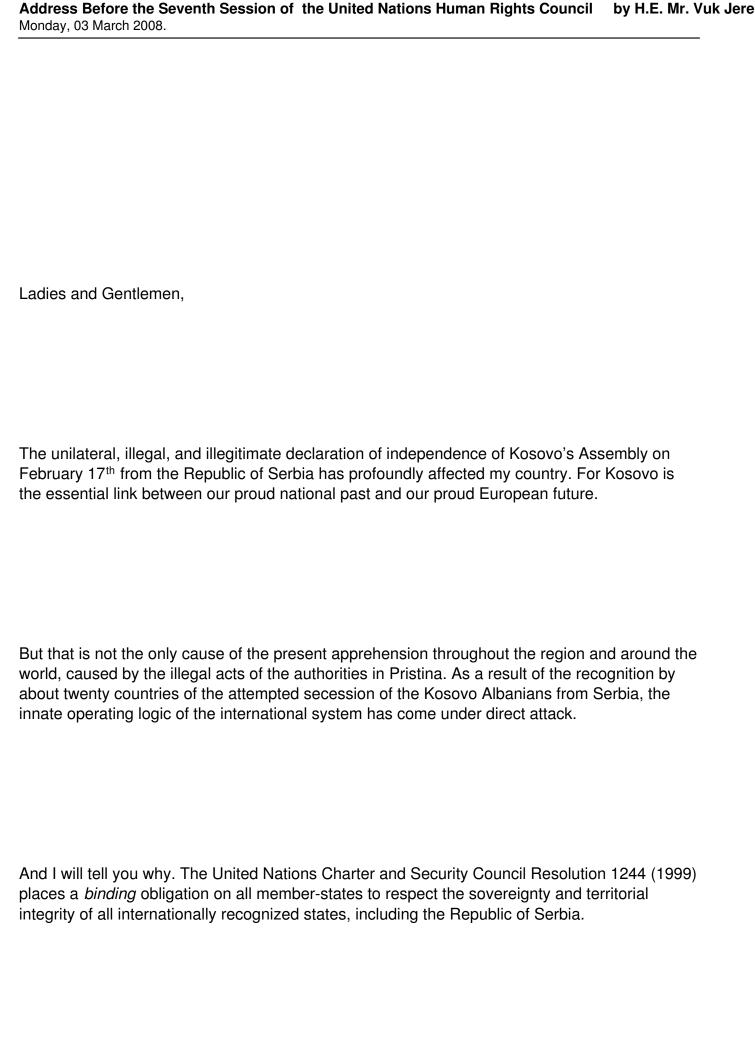
Kosovo is a place where the vulnerable have simply been forgotten.

In the wake of the arrival of the UN and NATO in June 1999 after a 78-day bombing campaign, hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks and others were ethnically cleansed from their centuries-old hearths. Hundreds have been killed, and thousands more have disappeared without a trace. Tens of thousands of homes and businesses have been destroyed, and tens of thousands more have been illegally occupied by ethnic Albanians.

The UN Committee on Human Rights has harshly criticized the lack of human rights protection in Kosovo, concluding that "discrimination against Serbs and Roma is widespread in Kosovo." Amnesty International has echoed those words. And in a report issued just a few days ago, Human Rights Watch said that "today, Kosovo is a place where human rights are frequently violated, where political violence, impunity for common and political crimes, intimidation and discrimination are commonplace. [...] Organized crime and corruption are largely unchecked, [...] witness harassment is widespread, [...] domestic violence is a serious and prevalent problem, [...] and trafficking of women remains a serious issue", as is forced prostitution.

Perhaps most appallingly, less than eight percent of the estimated 250,000 Kosovo Serb IDPs have returned to their homes, conceivably because the UNHCR warns that Kosovo Serbs, Roma and others risk persecution if they return to areas in which they would be in a minority.

It's also because for many displaced Serbs, security fears and deep concerns about freedom of movement, access to courts, employment, housing, healthcare, education and other public services impede return.
The litany of offences is endless; the remedial list of concrete steps taken is trivial.
Consider that hundreds of Serbian holy sites remain to this day under the heavy protection of NATO. Monks, nuns and priests live encircled by tanks, barbed wire, and electric fences.
More than 150 Serbian Orthodox monasteries and churches have been destroyed since June 1999 in wanton acts of cultural cleansing, including 35 in a three-day period in March 2004.
Let me pause for a moment on the significance of these living religious communities, and of Kosovo more generally, for the Serbian people. The Orthodox holy sites of Kosovo—some of which have been placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage Sites, and alarmingly, on its List of World Heritage in Danger—stand at the foundation of Serbian identity. They are not simply buildings or mere monuments. They constitute an essential link to the living tradition of Serbia today.



By furthering the secessionist cause of the Kosovo Albanians, the international system has become more unstable, more insecure, and more unpredictable. A terrible precedent has been established.

Recognizing the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence from Serbia legitimizes the doctrine of imposing solutions to ethnic conflicts. It legitimizes the act of unilateral secession by a provincial or other non-state actor. It transforms the right to self-determination into an avowed right to independence. It legitimizes the forced partition of internationally-recognized, sovereign states. And it supplies any ethnic or religious group with a grievance against its capital with a play book on how to achieve their ends.

I want to be very clear. We will never recognize the attempt by the authorities in Pristina to unilaterally secede from Serbia. We call upon the countries that have recognized to reconsider, and we call on those that have not to stay the course, to help us defend the international system from being fundamentally undermined. And we applaud the United Nations in so far resisting the pressure from a vocal minority of countries to cede the administration of Serbia's southern province to an illegitimate European Union mission, in clear violation of Security Council Resolution 1244. We hope that this will continue. Anything less would strike at the very heart of the core constituent elements of global governance.

Excellencies,
We are here to talk about human rights.
So I would like to conclude my remarks to you this afternoon by telling you about a very special young woman from Kosovo.
Her name is Slobodanka Tasic. Born in 1992, she was 7 years old when the bombs began to fall on Serbia, in 1999. It was the year her father Saša went missing. It was the year her ancestral home in the village of Strezovce was torched to the ground. And it was the year she and her mother became IDPs.
It was a terrible year.

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by H.E. Mr. Vuk Jere

Taking shelter in a neighboring village, Slobodanka and her family remained in Kosovo and Metohija.
They survived.
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Slobodanka came to world attention late last year when she wrote a letter to President Boris Tadic of Serbia, a letter he read to the Security Council.
"As I write this letter to you, I feel like a leaf on a tree that does not know which way the wind will blow", the now fifteen year old wrote.

"My childhood is different from that of children who live in freedom. They have friends, but mine is fear. Fear of the early dawn; fear of the setting sun", she continued.
"And it is because of all the tears of children, because of all our pain, because of the early opened wounds that do not heal, Mr. President, that I implore you to transmit my message to the world. They have taken away our right to an innocent childhood; our right to live freely; our right to be happy. They have taken away the warmth of family life. Let them not take away our right to live even such a life as we have now: the right to live in our own country."
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Now they have tried to take even that away from her. For today Slobodanka no longer lives permanently in Kosovo.
For when her letter was read by President Tadic, her family was forced to flee by Kosovo Albanians.

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This is no temporary policy. We are not just posturing. It is a part of a national strategy to keep Serbia whole and free, fully integrated into Europe, and actively engaged with the world.
And we will pursue it for as long as our country itself survives.
Kosovo shall remain a part of Serbia forever.
Thank you, Mr. President.