

**Remarks by Gillian Sorensen**  
**WFUNA Luncheon**  
**May 20, 2009**

Thank you, Bill (vanden Heuvel), for that kind introduction and for your leadership as President of the Friends of WFUNA. My respects and thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Secretary-General Kofi Annan for their generous words and to Hans Blix and Pera Wells who lead WFUNA so ably and to Janet Ross and Lou Perlmutter who co-chaired this event. And a special thank you for Bill Luers' kind words and Edson Kodama's great video. Distinguished diplomats, NGOs, colleagues from the UN Foundation, the UN Association, friends, and family -- Ted and daughter Juliet. I am grateful for this recognition and stand on the shoulders of so many of you who have served with courage and dedication and are my role models.

I live with a deep and abiding conviction: That the UN matters and we need to say so loud and clear; that it is a unique and valuable instrument, imperfect but indispensable; that it serves our national interest as well as the global interest; that when the US is fully committed, visible and engaged the chance of success is always greater; and that true success requires broad public support, especially from UNAs across the country and WFUNA around the world.

This has been a fascinating journey and it's not over yet. I feel more fortunate than I can say that I found my place, my mission working with and for the United Nations. I cannot imagine anyplace I would rather be. The UN is the embodiment of hope, the place where idealism and realism meet.

I feel as though this journey has had three acts, maybe four. First, as NYC Commissioner for the UN, appointed by Mayor Edward Koch where we transformed an adversarial relationship between the City and the diplomatic corps into a cooperative, communicative and supportive one. We worked on matters of diplomatic immunity, discrimination, security, housing and business contacts. We managed 5 Sister City relationships and secured federal reimbursement for the costs of police protection for diplomats.

Second, I was recruited into the UN Secretariat by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali and charged with mobilizing and directing the 50th Anniversary commemoration to deepen understanding and support of the UN. I traveled to every continent, worked with diplomats, politicians, academics, business and religious leaders and the universe of NGOs and directed the 50th events at HQ in September 1995. Then, under Kofi Annan I was charged with outreach to 4,200 NGOs and was, by turns, mediator and interpreter, moderator and debater, consensus builder, spokesman and advocate. To borrow a phrase that has new meaning, in the diplomatic context I was a "community organizer" or, as the New York Times put it, "The Diplomat's Diplomat."

Third, thanks to the UN Foundation and its remarkable leaders Tim Wirth and Ted Turner and with the cooperation of UNA I became a "National Advocate," riding the circuit, speaking about the UN, seeking to seize the field from the UN bashers, to engage and elevate the debate, to heal the breach that had existed for too long between the US and the UN. I traveled from Portland, Maine to Portland, Oregon; from Missoula, Montana to Birmingham, Alabama. I spoke to students, and seniors, women's groups, teachers, journalists and soldiers -- yes, at Fort Hood Texas, at the Air Force Academy in Colorado and (in September) at West Point. I spoke at Harvard, Duke and Stanford but also at Oral Roberts University and Regent University (evangelical Christian schools) to reach further afield. In Fargo, my audience included Sudanese refugees and in Omaha, Iraqi refugees. In Michigan, members of the (self appointed ) Michigan Militia came, very big men wearing camouflage, to tell me the UN was "a threat to our sovereignty." They are wrong, of course. I addressed dozens of Model UNs. Recently the "secretary-general" was a student from my school, Smith College. She may have been 21. I watched her preside with confidence and skill and thought "There is the future before my very eyes." My goal on these travels has been to inform, inspire and answer 1000 questions. I can tell you for certain, Americans want the United States to rise to its best self, to regain our reputation and our moral authority, to earn trust, respect and credibility. They want the UN to succeed and students long to work in the international arena and, as they always say, to make a difference.

I am always struck by the power of words and see myself as a messenger. Speaking is not new to me. At 13, I entered the first of many forensic contests. The judge's critique said "speaking impediment does not detract" and awarded me a prize. I'm still working on the speech impediment and still speaking. It's in my genes – from two eloquent parents and then, too, by marriage to someone who knows a little about the power of words.

And now, with President Obama we enter a new "era of engagement" in which we "strengthen our common security by investing in our common humanity" and I am full of hope --- that the US will stand tall, regain its stature and repair its frayed relations with the world; that we will recapture the confidence and optimism that surrounded the birth of the UN; that the UN, with American leadership, will rise to meet both need and opportunity and that we who care and support the Organization will speak clearly and forcefully so that it is defined not by its critics but rather by its supporters and its successes and achievements.

This is a long road and we have far to go but there is no one I would rather travel with than you. If we stay this course, there is a chance that we can fulfill the vision of the founders who really believed in a world without war, where it was possible for peace, justice, human rights, education, health, hope and opportunity to be the birthright of every human being. What, after all, could be more important.