Brief Report on the 65th U.N. General Assembly MDG Summit & General Debate Sessions (September 2010, New York)

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• The U.N. General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations.

• Comprising all 192 Member States of the U.N.

• Holding High-Level (Heads of State/Government) Meetings in New York in September of each year.
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Summit

- Close to 140 Heads of State or Government attended and made statements.
- One negotiations outcome document was adopted. – “Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals”.
  a. Identifies the lessons learnt over the past 10 years, including the barriers to implementation and points to opportunities for further progress;
  b. Action agenda to achieve the MDGs by 2015.
General Debate Sessions

- 186 Member States of the U.N. took the floor.

Global Financial Reform:
- One consensus was reached: G-20 is the focal point for global coordination, as the circle of cooperation must include emerging economies.
- Many delegations have pointed out its importance. (Global Governance)
- But it was also pointed out that there needs to be open and ongoing dialogue between G-20 and the U.N. General Assembly in order for the G-20 to retain its relevance and legitimacy.
In light of this, President of the U.N. General Assembly announced to launch an informal dialogue with U.N. Secretary-General and G-20 host country before and after this year’s G-20 summit in South Korea.

Global Climate Change:

- Almost all Member States reiterated the common interest and necessity to meet the responsibilities to protect our planet, maintain worldwide effects to address this subject, and unleash the power of clean energy to serve as an engine of growth and development.
- Adaptation, Mitigation, Climate Finance, Technology Transfer, and Capacity-building were underscored.
- Sustainable Development, Biodiversity, and Small-island States were also mentioned in this connection.
• But it is also pretty clear that there mostly would not be a comprehensive agreement to be made in this year’s Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico. At best, there will be some “tangible”/”doable” achievements, eg. a global climate financing fund.

➤ Israel-Palestine peace process:
• This subject is as old as the U.N., the organization itself.
• Member States of the U.N. General Assembly are still highly divided into two blocs – friends of Israel and friends of Palestinian people. The huge distrustfulness and gap remain.
• President Obama reaffirmed U.S. position: support the goal of two states – Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as part of a comprehensive peace between Israel and all of its neighbors.
Israel’s continuation and expansion of settlement building in the West Bank is currently the major obstacle to the process.

➢ Nuclear Non-Proliferation:

• One most significant achievement was highlighted: the United States and the Russian Federation had signed a comprehensive arms treaty, reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security strategies, at this year’s Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference (every 5 years).

• Iran’s nuclear program and noncooperation remains a hot issue.

• The U.N. Security Council held a closed-door P-5+1 Ministerial Meeting alongside with the U.N. General Assembly General Debate. Ministers called for full implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929, and urged Iran to return to the P-5+1 dialogue/negotiation table ASAP.
• As usual, Iranian President Ahmadinejad continued using U.N. General Assembly annual general debate as his “showroom”. His “9-11 denier” speech resulted in the walkout by US and European delegations.

➢ Pakistan Disaster Relief:

• The disaster has affected more than 20 million people (more than 10 percent of the total population). Devastating communities throughout the country, in an area of at least 160,000 square kilometres — larger than England — the floods killed more than 1,700 people, and damaged or destroyed nearly 1.9 million homes.

• The United States has provided approximately $345 million in governmental assistance.
A few other subjects were also mentioned by member states in the GA General Debate, such as the upcoming Referenda in Sudan, 10-year Mapping Report on DRC, Global Food Crisis, and so on. Hundreds of side events, bilateral and multilateral meetings/consultations among various international organizations, public and private sectors, civil society and NGOs were taking place alongside with the General Assembly. (For example, Clinton’s Global Initiative and New York City’s Climate Week.)

After all, the annual U.N. General Assembly General Debate remains an important forum for world leaders to meet, chat and exchange views. Little progress is certainly better than no progress or no communication at all.
Two extra points:

- One interesting incident related to President Obama’s popularity: President Obama was the third speaker in the GA General Debate session. Right after his speech and after he was escorted by the Secret Service out of the General Assembly hall, about two-thirds of people in the hall started to leave as well. There were more than 180 Heads of State/Government who would speak after President Obama. During Obama’s speech, there was a full house in the General Assembly, and some people did not have seats and just stood there. This incident may in certain level reflect President Obama’s current international popularity, though his domestic one certainly does not look very good right now.
The subjects that the ABA, the Section of International Law, especially our coordinating committee may be able to make contributions to or watch closely:

- A relatively new idea “Global Governance” is highlighted in this year’s high-level meetings. Speakers addressed this subject from public policy, political science, international relations, or diplomatic perspectives. There was rarely anybody addressing it from legal or lawyers’ perspective. ABA may make some contributions on this.

- The serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were identified by a newly-released 10-Year Mapping Report from the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. The report was officially released one and half weeks ago. There are currently some discussions in the U.N. regarding
whether there should be a new ad-hoc international criminal tribunal to be set up to look into this case, or at least some sort of international inquiry commission. ABA members may be interested in serving as judge, prosecutor or defense attorney, in case such a new body is finally set up.

- Climate change / global warming is not something that would just simply go away. The United States certainly will not take a lead in this issue this year, because of the current big political climate. But this subject sooner or later will come back to everybody’s agenda. It is just a matter of time. The ABA, especially our coordinating committee, may at least keep an eye on this issue.

- Thank you.
Dr. Hong Tang is a practicing lawyer and scholar focusing on international law and policy. Dr. Tang received an S.J.D. from the Golden Gate University School of Law, and an LL.M. from the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law. Dr. Tang was admitted to the Bars of the State of New York and various Federal Courts. Dr. Hong Tang is currently the Chair of the Subcommittee on Climate Change under the United Nations Committee at the New York City Bar, and the official representative of the New York City Bar to the United Nations. Dr. Tang is the Vice-Chair (2010-2011) to the U.N. & International Institutions Coordinating Committee and the International Environmental Law Committee of the American Bar Association (ABA International), and a Steering Group member (2010-2011) to the International Energy & Natural Resources Committee of ABA International. Dr. Tang is also an Executive Committee member of the Young Lawyers Section at the New York State Bar Association. Dr. Tang's research, practice and interests cover almost every area in international law and policy. Dr. Hong Tang's scholarly and professional articles were published by the American Society of International Law and the New York State Bar Association. Dr. Tang was also invited to present his work at the 74th Biennial Conference of London-based International Law Association, also serving as the 100th Anniversary of the Netherlands Society of International Law, which was held in the "legal capital of the world" - The Hague, Netherlands. Dr. Tang can be reached at tang@lawyer.com