

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**New York, 19 September 2023**

Mr. President of the General Assembly,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Just nine days ago, many of the world's challenges coalesced in one awful  
hellscape.

Thousands of people in Derna, Libya lost their lives in epic, unprecedented  
flooding.

They were victims many times over.

Victims of years of conflict.

Victims of climate chaos.

Victims of leaders – near and far – who failed to find a way to peace.

The people of Derna lived and died in the epicentre of that indifference – as the  
skies unleashed 100 times the monthly rainfall in 24 hours ... as dams broke after  
years of war and neglect ... as everything they knew was wiped off the map.

Even now, as we speak, bodies are washing ashore from the same Mediterranean  
Sea where billionaires sunbathe on their super yachts.

Derna is a sad snapshot of the state of our world – the flood of inequity, of  
injustice, of inability to confront the challenges in our midst.

Excellencies,

Our world is becoming unhinged.

Geopolitical tensions are rising.

Global challenges are mounting.

And we seem incapable of coming together to respond.

We confront a host of existential threats – from the climate crisis to disruptive technologies – and we do so at a time of chaotic transition.

For much of the Cold War, international relations were largely seen through the prism of two superpowers.

Then came a short period of unipolarity.

Now we are rapidly moving towards a multipolar world.

This is, in many ways, positive. It brings new opportunities for justice and balance in international relations.

But multipolarity alone cannot guarantee peace.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe had numerous powers. But it lacked robust multilateral institutions. The result was World War I.

A multipolar world needs strong and effective multilateral institutions.

Yet global governance is stuck in time.

Look no further than United Nations Security Council and the Bretton Woods system.

They reflect the political and economic realities of 1945, when many countries in this Assembly Hall were still under colonial domination.

The world has changed.  
Our institutions have not.

We cannot effectively address problems as they are if institutions don't reflect the world as it is.

Instead of solving problems, they risk becoming part of the problem.

And, indeed, divides are deepening.

Divides among economic and military powers.

Divides between North and South, East and West.

We are inching ever closer to a Great Fracture in economic and financial systems and trade relations; one that threatens a single, open internet; with diverging strategies on technology and artificial intelligence; and potentially clashing security frameworks.

It is high time to renew multilateral institutions based on 21<sup>st</sup> century economic and political realities – rooted in equity, solidarity and universality – anchored in the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.

That means reforming the Security Council in line with the world of today.

It means redesigning the international financial architecture so that it becomes truly universal and serves as a global safety net for developing countries in trouble.

I have no illusions. Reforms are a question of power.

I know there are many competing interests and agendas.

But the alternative to reform is not the status quo.

The alternative to reform is further fragmentation.

It's reform or rupture.

At the same time, divides are widening within countries. Democracy is under threat. Authoritarianism is on the march. Inequalities are growing. And hate speech is on the rise.

In the face of all these challenges and more, compromise has become a dirty word.

Our world needs statesmanship, not gamesmanship and gridlock.

As I told the G20, it is time for a global compromise.

Politics is compromise.

Diplomacy is compromise.

Effective leadership is compromise.

Leaders have a special responsibility to achieve compromise in building a common future of peace and prosperity for our common good.

Excellencies,

Over the past year, we have shown the promise of multilateral action.

With important new global agreements on safeguarding biodiversity ... on protecting the high seas ... on climate loss and damage ... on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

We have all the tools and resources to solve our shared challenges.

What we need is determination.

Determination is the DNA of our United Nations – summoning us with the first words of our Charter:

“We the peoples of the United Nations...determined”:

Determined to end the scourge of war.

Determined to reaffirm faith in human rights.

Determined to uphold justice and respect international law.

And determined to promote social progress and better lives for all people.

It falls to us -- through our actions – to apply that determination to the challenges of today.

Excellencies,

It starts with determination to uphold the Charter’s pledge for peace.

Yet instead of ending the scourge of war, we are seeing a surge of conflicts, coups and chaos.

If every country fulfilled its obligations under the Charter, the right to peace would be guaranteed.

When countries break those pledges, they create a world of insecurity for everyone.

Exhibit A: Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The war, in violation of the United Nations Charter and international law, has unleashed a nexus of horror: lives destroyed; human rights abused; families torn apart; children traumatized; hopes and dreams shattered.

Beyond Ukraine, the war has serious implications for us all.

Nuclear threats put us all at risk.

Ignoring global treaties and conventions makes us all less safe.

And the poisoning of global diplomacy obstructs progress across the board.

We must not relent in working for peace – a just peace in line with the UN Charter and international law.

And even while fighting rages, we must pursue every avenue to ease the suffering of civilians in Ukraine and beyond.

The Black Sea Initiative was one such avenue.

The world badly needs Ukrainian food and Russian food and fertilizers to stabilize markets and guarantee food security.

I will not give up on my efforts to make it happen.

Excellencies,

Around the globe, old tensions fester while new risks emerge.

Nuclear disarmament is at a standstill while countries develop new weapons and make new threats.

Across the Sahel, a series of coups is further destabilizing the region as terrorism is gaining ground.

Sudan is descending into full-scale civil war, millions have fled and the country risks splitting apart.

In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, millions are displaced and gender-based violence is a horrific daily reality.

In Haiti, a country that suffered centuries of colonial exploitation is today overwhelmed by gang violence – and still awaits international support.

In Afghanistan, a staggering 70 per cent of the population needs humanitarian assistance with the rights of women and girls systematically denied.

In Myanmar, brutal violence, worsening poverty, and repression are crushing hopes for a return to democracy.

In the Middle East, escalating violence and bloodshed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is taking a terrible toll on civilians.

Unilateral actions are intensifying and undermining the possibility of a two-State solution -- the only pathway to lasting peace and security for Palestinians and Israelis.

Syria remains in ruins while peace remains remote.

Meanwhile, natural disasters are worsening the man-made disaster of conflict.

In the face of these mounting crises, the global humanitarian system is on the verge of collapse.

Needs are rising.

And funding is drying up.

Our humanitarian operations are being forced to make massive cuts.

But if we don't feed the hungry, we are feeding conflict.

I urge all countries to step up and fund the Global Humanitarian Appeal.

Excellencies,

The peace and security architecture is under unprecedented strain.

That is why -- in the context of preparations for the Summit of the Future – we put forward ideas for the consideration of Member States for a New Agenda for Peace, based on the Charter and international law.

It provides a unifying vision to address existing and new threats for a world in transition.

Calling on States to recommit to a world free from nuclear weapons, and to end the erosion of the nuclear disarmament and arms control regime.

Bolstering prevention at the global level by maximizing the capacity and convening power of the UN and our good offices to bridge geo-political divides.

Bolstering prevention at the national level by linking actions for peace with progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Putting women's leadership and participation at the centre of decision-making, and committing to the eradication of all forms of violence against women.

Calling for a broad-based reflection on peacekeeping to make it nimbler and more adaptable, with forward-looking transition and exit strategies from the start.

And supporting peace enforcement action by regional organizations – notably the African Union -- with Security Council mandates and predictable funding.

Determination for peace also requires new governance frameworks for emerging threats – from artificial intelligence to lethal autonomous weapons systems that function without human control.

Excellencies,

Peace is inextricably linked to sustainable development.

We see a familiar pattern around the world: the closer a country is to conflict, the farther it is from the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Charter calls on us to be determined in promoting social progress. In 21<sup>st</sup> century terms, that means achieving the SDGs.

Yet inequality defines our time.

From cities where skyscrapers tower over slums;

To countries that are forced to choose between serving their people, or servicing their debts.

Today, Africa spends more on debt interest than on healthcare.

Yesterday's SDG Summit was about a global rescue plan to scale up support from billions to trillions.

Excellencies,

The international financial architecture is dysfunctional, outdated and unjust.

The deep reforms that are needed won't happen overnight.

But we can take determined steps now to help countries weather crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

By urgently advancing the SDG Stimulus of 500 billion dollars per year and relieving the financial burden on developing and emerging economies.

By scaling up development and climate finance -- increasing the capital base and changing the business model of Multilateral Development Banks.

By ensuring effective debt relief mechanisms and channelling emergency financial support towards those in greatest need.

Excellencies,

We must be determined to tackle the most immediate threat to our future: our overheating planet.

Climate change is not just a change in the weather.

Climate change is changing life on our planet.

It is affecting every aspect of our work.

It is killing people and devastating communities.

Around the world, we see not only accelerating temperatures, we see an acceleration in sea levels rising – glaciers receding – deadly diseases spreading – the extinction of species — and cities under threat.

And this is only the beginning.

We have just survived the hottest days, hottest months, and hottest summer on the books.

Behind every broken record are broken economies, broken lives and whole nations at the breaking point.

Every continent, every region and every country is feeling the heat. But I'm not sure all leaders are feeling that heat.

Actions are falling abysmally short.

There is still time to keep rising temperatures within the 1.5 degree limits of the Paris Climate Agreement.

But that requires drastic steps now – to cut greenhouse gas emissions, and to ensure climate justice for those who did least to cause the crisis but are paying the highest price.

We have the receipts.

G20 countries are responsible for 80 per cent of greenhouse emissions. They must lead.

They must break their addiction to fossil fuels and heed the International Energy Agency's findings that new oil and gas licensing by them is incompatible with keeping the 1.5 degree limit alive.

To stand a fighting chance of limiting global temperature rise, we must phase out coal, oil and gas in a fair and equitable way – and massively boost renewables.

This is the only path to affordable renewable energy for all.

The fossil fuel age has failed.

If fossil fuel companies want to be part of the solution, they must lead the transition to renewable energy.

No more dirty production. No more fake solutions. No more bankrolling climate denial.

I have laid out a Climate Solidarity Pact, in which all big emitters make extra efforts to cut emissions; and wealthier countries support emerging economies with finance and technology to do so.

For example, Africa has 60 per cent of the world's solar capacity – but just 2 per cent of renewable investments.

I have put forward an Acceleration Agenda to supercharge these efforts.

Developed countries must reach net zero as close as possible to 2040, and emerging economies as close as possible to 2050.

Immediate steps include:

An end to coal – by 2030 for OECD countries and 2040 for the rest of the world.

An end to fossil fuel subsidies.

And a price on carbon.

Developed countries must finally deliver the \$100 billion for developing country climate action, as promised;

Double adaptation finance by 2025, as promised;

And replenish the Green Climate Fund, as promised.

All countries must work to operationalize the loss and damage fund this year.

And ensure universal Early Warning coverage by 2027.

Tomorrow, I will welcome credible first movers and doers to our Climate Ambition Summit.

COP28 is around the corner.

Climate chaos is breaking new records, but we cannot afford the same old broken record of scapegoating and waiting for others to move first.

And to all those working, marching and championing real climate action, I want you to know:

You are on the right side of history. I'm with you. I won't give up this fight of our lives.

Excellencies,

We must also be determined to honour the Charter's commitment to fundamental human rights.

Just four women signed our founding document. One look around this room shows not enough has changed.

"We, the Peoples" does not mean "We, the men."

Women are still waiting for equal opportunities and equal pay; for equality under the law; for their work to be valued and their opinions to count.

Around the globe, women's rights – including sexual and reproductive rights -- are being suppressed and even rolled back, and women's freedoms curtailed.

In some countries, women and girls are punished for wearing too many clothes; in others, for wearing too few.

Thanks to generations of women's rights activists, times are changing.

From sports fields to schools and public squares, girls and women are challenging the patriarchy -- and winning.

I stand with them.

I entered this office with a commitment to ensuring gender parity at the UN.

We achieved that at senior levels and are on track to do so across the UN system.

Because gender equality is not the problem. Gender equality is the solution.

It is not a favour to women; it is fundamental to ensuring a better future for all.

Excellencies,

We must be determined to answer the Call to Action to put human rights at the heart of our work.

Seventy-five years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there has been enormous progress in some areas, from ending colonization and segregation to ensuring women's voting rights.

But we have not achieved basic rights for all when 1.2 billion people still live in acute poverty, and hunger is at levels not seen since 2005.

When discrimination on racial and ethnic grounds is perfectly legal in many countries.

When people must risk death to seek a better life.

When refugees, migrants and minorities are routinely demonized and hounded.

When declaring your gender identity or simply who you love can lead to imprisonment or even execution.

When speaking out can lead to perilous consequences.

Human rights – political, civil, economic, social and cultural – are the key to solving many of the world's interlinked problems.

Laws to protect the vulnerable must be enacted and enforced; the targeting of minorities must stop; and human rights and human dignity must be at the centre of social, economic, and migration policies.

All governments must fulfil the commitment they made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Excellencies,

We must also face up to the looming threats posed to human rights by new technologies.

Generative artificial intelligence holds much promise – but it may also lead us across a Rubicon and into more danger than we can control.

When I mentioned Artificial Intelligence in my General Assembly speech in 2017, only two other leaders even uttered the term.

Now AI is on everyone's lips – a subject of both awe, and fear.

Even some of those who developed generative AI are calling for greater regulation.

But many of the dangers of digital technology are not looming.

They are here.

The digital divide is inflaming inequalities.

Hate speech, disinformation and conspiracy theories on social media platforms are spread and amplified by AI, undermining democracy and fueling violence and conflict in real life.

Online surveillance and data harvesting are enabling human rights abuses on a mass scale.

And technology companies and governments are far from finding solutions.

Excellencies,

We must move fast and mend things.

New technologies require new and innovative forms of governance – with input from experts building this technology and from those monitoring its abuses.

And we urgently need a Global Digital Compact -- between governments, regional organizations, the private sector and civil society -- to mitigate the risks of digital technologies, and identify ways to harness their benefits for the good of humanity.

Some have called for consideration of a new global entity on AI that could provide a source of information and expertise for Member States.

There are many different models -- inspired by such examples as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Civil Aviation Organization or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The UN stands ready to host the global and inclusive discussions that are needed, depending on the decisions of Member States.

To help advance the search for concrete governance solutions, I will appoint this month a High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence – which will provide recommendations by the end of this year.

Next year's Summit of the Future is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for progress to deal with these new threats, in line with the vision of the UN Charter.

Member States will decide how to move forward on the New Agenda for Peace, the Global Digital Compact, reforms to the international financial architecture, and many other proposals to address challenges and bring greater justice and equity to global governance.

Excellencies,

The United Nations was created precisely for moments like this – moments of maximum danger and minimum agreement.

We can and must use our tools in flexible and creative ways.

Last month, we saw the dividends of determination off the coast of Yemen.

Carrying one million barrels of oil, the decaying FSO Safer supertanker was a ticking time bomb -- a looming ecological disaster in the Red Sea.

But no one offered to solve the problem.

So the United Nations stepped in and brought the world together.

We mobilized resources, assembled the experts, navigated difficult negotiations and built trust.

We have more work ahead – and more resources are needed.

But last month, the oil was successfully transferred from the Safer.

This UN-led action saved the Red Sea.

When no one else could or would, UN determination got the job done.

Despite our long list of global challenges, that same spirit of determination can guide us forward.

Let us be determined to heal divisions and forge peace.

Determined to uphold the dignity and worth of every person.

Determined to realize the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind.

Determined to reform multilateralism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and come together for the common good.

Thank you.