

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
New York, 20 September 2016

Your Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I stand before you with gratitude for your support across the decade I have had the privilege to serve the United Nations.

In taking the oath of office in December 2006, I pledged to work with you for “we the peoples”.

With the Charter as our guide, and the dedication of the staff, we have achieved much together.

I also stand before you with deep concern.

Gulfs of mistrust divide citizens from their leaders. Extremists push people into camps of “us” and “them”. The Earth assails us with rising seas, record heat and extreme storms. And danger defines the days of many.

One hundred and thirty million people need life-saving assistance. Tens of millions of them are children and young people -- our next generation already at risk.

Yet after ten years in office, I am more convinced than ever that we have the power to end war, poverty and persecution. We have the means to prevent conflict. We have the potential to close the gap between rich and poor, and to make rights real in people’s lives.

Excellencies,

With the Sustainable Development Goals, we have a manifesto for a better future.

With the Paris Agreement on climate change, we are tackling the defining challenge of our time.

We have no time to lose. I urge you to bring the Paris Agreement into force this year. We need just 26 countries representing just 15 per cent of emissions.

I ask you to help lead us to a world of low-carbon growth, increased resilience and greater opportunity and well-being for our children.

Excellencies,

These great gains are threatened by grave security threats.

Armed conflicts have grown more protracted and complex. Governance failures have pushed societies past the brink. Radicalization has threatened social cohesion – precisely the response that violent extremists seek and welcome.

The tragic consequences are on brutal display from Yemen to Libya and Iraq, from Afghanistan to the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin.

In today's world, the conflict in Syria is taking the greatest number of lives and sowing the widest instability. There is no military solution. Many groups have killed many innocents – but none more so than the Government of Syria, which continues to barrel bomb neighbourhoods and systematically torture thousands of detainees. Powerful patrons that keep feeding the war machine also have blood on their hands. Present in this Hall today are representatives of governments that have ignored, facilitated, funded, participated in or even planned and carried out atrocities inflicted by all sides of the Syria conflict against Syrian civilians.

Just when we think it cannot get any worse, the bar of depravity sinks lower. Yesterday's sickening, savage, and apparently deliberate attack on a UN-Syrian Arab Red Crescent aid convoy is the latest example.

The United Nations has been forced to suspend aid convoys as a result of this outrage. The humanitarians delivering life-saving aid were heroes. Those who bombed them were cowards.

Accountability for crimes such as these is essential.

I appeal to all those with influence to end the fighting and get talks started. A political transition is long overdue. After so much violence and misrule, the future of Syria should not rest on the fate of a single man.

One year ago, Palestine proudly raised its flag at UN Headquarters. Yet the prospects for a two-state solution are being lowered by the day. All the while, the occupation grinds into its 50th year.

As a friend of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, it pains me that this past decade has been ten years lost to peace. Ten years lost to illegal settlement expansion. Ten years lost to intra-Palestinian divide, growing polarization and hopelessness.

This is madness. Replacing a two-state solution with a one-state construct would spell doom: denying Palestinians their freedom and rightful future, and pushing Israel further from its vision of a Jewish democracy towards greater global isolation.

On the Korean Peninsula, the fifth nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has again threatened regional and international security. Meanwhile, the people's suffering and plight are worsening. I urge the leaders of the DPRK to change course and fulfil their obligations – to their own people and to the family of nations.

In Ukraine, the violence has caused an internal upheaval, renewed tensions across Europe and rekindled geopolitical rivalries.

In South Sudan, leaders have also betrayed their people.

Indeed, in too many places, we see leaders rewriting constitutions, manipulating elections and taking other desperate steps to cling to power.

Leaders must understand that holding office is a trust, granted by the people, not personal property.

My message to all is clear: serve your people. Do not subvert democracy; do not pilfer your country's resources; do not imprison and torture your critics.

Excellencies,

Yesterday we made great progress in helping people find a haven from conflict and tyranny.

The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants points the way toward saving lives and protecting the rights of millions of people. We all must meet those promises.

All too often, refugees and migrants face hatred. Muslims in particular are being targeted by stereotyping and suspicion that have haunting echoes of the dark past. I say to political leaders and candidates: do not engage in the cynical and dangerous political math that says you add votes by dividing people and multiplying fear. The world must stand up against lies and distortions of truth, and reject all forms of discrimination.

We must also address the factors that compel people to move. That means investing in conflict prevention and engaging in patient diplomacy. And as the demand for peacekeeping rises, we must continue strengthening peace operations to help countries secure and sustain peace. I am encouraged that the General Assembly has endorsed the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which can help us tackle the drivers of conflict.

In Myanmar, the transition has entered a promising new phase. In Sri Lanka, post-war healing efforts have deepened. In both countries, true reconciliation rests on ensuring that all communities, minorities and majorities alike, are included in building a new union.

Next Monday, I will travel to Colombia for the signing of a peace agreement to end one of the world's longest-running armed conflicts. The United Nations will support the Colombian people every step of the way.

There is also encouraging movements towards an agreement on Cyprus.

Let us all support the progress and solutions that may now be at hand.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Je saisis cette occasion pour exprimer mes regrets au sujet de deux situations qui ont terni la réputation de l'Organisation et, pire encore, traumatisé les nombreuses populations que nous servons.

Premièrement, les actes odieux d'exploitation et de violence sexuelles commis par certains soldats de la paix et d'autres membres du personnel des Nations Unies ont aggravé les souffrances de populations déjà prises dans un conflit armé et sapé les efforts accomplis par tant d'autres agents de l'ONU dans le monde. Les protecteurs ne doivent jamais devenir des prédateurs. Les États Membres et le Secrétariat doivent redoubler d'efforts pour faire appliquer et renforcer la politique de tolérance zéro de l'Organisation.

Deuxièmement, Haïti a cumulé les épreuves : peu après un tremblement de terre dévastateur, le pays a été frappé par une épidémie de choléra. J'ai beaucoup de regret et de peine face aux terribles souffrances du peuple haïtien affecté par le choléra. Une nouvelle stratégie s'impose pour atténuer sa détresse et améliorer ses conditions de vie. Nous sommes fermement résolus à nous acquitter durablement de cette responsabilité morale.

Nous élaborons actuellement un ensemble de mesures d'assistance pour les personnes les plus directement touchées et redoublons d'efforts pour établir de solides systèmes d'approvisionnement en eau, d'assainissement et de santé, qui sont la meilleure défense à long terme contre les maladies. Nous n'y parviendrons qu'avec l'appui politique et financier sans faille des États Membres.

Je vous donnerai plus tard des précisions sur cette stratégie. Unissons nos efforts pour honorer nos obligations envers le peuple haïtien.

Excellencies,

Allow me to briefly touch on a few other areas that I hope will long remain priorities of the United Nations.

I am proud that UN Women came to life during my tenure. It is now our established champion of gender equality and empowerment, aiming for a "50-50 planet". I have appointed more women to senior positions at the United Nations than ever before -- and I am proud to call myself a feminist.

Women hold up half the sky and are essential to meeting all our goals.

So we must do far more to end deep-seated discrimination and chronic violence against women, to advance their participation in decision-making, and to ensure that every girl gets the start in life she deserves.

I have been a proud a defender of the rights of all people, regardless of ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.

Our human rights machinery – along with the Human Rights up Front initiative -- is placing human rights at the centre. Human rights are the pillars of society -- and the antidotes to violent extremism and civic despair.

We have deepened support for the Responsibility to Protect. We have made inroads against the death penalty. Landmark convictions by the International Criminal Court and other bodies have advanced accountability -- but we still must do far more to prevent genocide and other atrocity crimes.

Civil society is essential for all of these efforts.

I ask all of you to join me today in saying “yes” to greater space for civil society and independent media, and “no” to cracking down on the freedoms of assembly and expression.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Ces dix dernières années nous avons réalisé de grands progrès dans les domaines de l'éducation et de la santé.

Nous avons pratiquement éradiqué la polio. De plus en plus de femmes survivent à l'accouchement. Davantage d'enfants sont scolarisés et vivent plus longtemps, dans de meilleures conditions. Les mesures que nous avons prises ensemble pour contenir l'épidémie d'Ebola nous ont préparés à de futures urgences sanitaires. Les travaux du groupement tactique mondial sur la santé nous rappellent que la vigilance s'impose bien avant que les pandémies fassent la une des journaux.

La maîtrise des armes meurtrières a progressé grâce à la Convention sur les armes à sous-munitions et au Traité sur le commerce des armes, ainsi qu'à l'action efficace menée contre les armes chimiques. Nous devons tirer parti de cet élan pour nous rapprocher de l'objectif ultime : éliminer les armes nucléaires une fois pour toutes.

Le Sommet mondial sur l'action humanitaire a permis de renforcer les opérations de secours pour s'orienter vers la prévention et la résilience, ainsi que la réduction des besoins.

Nous tirons parti, comme jamais auparavant, de l'énergie des jeunes, notamment grâce à l'action de mon tout premier Envoyé pour la jeunesse et du nouvel Envoyé spécial sur l'emploi des jeunes.

Les partenariats avec le secteur privé se sont multipliés : nous encourageons les entreprises à adopter des pratiques responsables qui soient les meilleures pour la société et le monde. Nous avons aussi fait de grands progrès pour ce qui est d'adapter et de réformer l'Organisation aux réalités du XXI^e siècle.

Excellencies,

Continued progress will require new heights of solidarity.

Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. Member States have still not agreed on a formula for reform of the Security Council -- a continuing risk to its effectiveness and legitimacy.

In the same spirit, I want to put on the table a major and much needed reform for fairness and effectiveness in the United Nations.

Far too often, I have seen widely-supported proposals blocked, in the name of consensus, by a few or even just one country.

We see this being done by large and small countries alike.

Time and again, I have seen essential action and good ideas blocked in the Security Council. Blocked in the General Assembly. Blocked in the budget process, the Conference on Disarmament and other bodies.

We see this being done by large and small countries alike.

Is it fair in this complicated world for any one country to yield such disproportionate power, and hold the world hostage on so many important issues?

Consensus should not be confused with unanimity. The global public is right to ask whether this is how an organization in which we have invested so much hope and aspirations should function.

I propose, Mr. President, that you explore, with my successor, the establishment of a high-level panel to find practical solutions that will improve decision-making at the United Nations.

States must also respect the independence of the Secretariat, in accordance with the Charter. When our reports say what needs to be said, Member States should not try and rewrite history.

When our human rights personnel act on behalf of the most vulnerable, Member States should not block their path.

When our humanitarian workers need to reach populations under siege, Member States should remove all obstacles.

And when our envoys and personnel raise difficult issues, Member States should not ostracize them or threaten to banish them from the country.

We must all be open and accountable to the people we serve.

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is one last measure of the change that has defined the past decade.

It is hard to believe, but when I took office, a smart phone like this had not even been introduced to the world.

Today it is a lifeline and, perhaps at times, the bane of our existence!

It is an indispensable part of our lives.

Our phones and social media have connected the world in ways that were unimaginable when I took office. Yes, they have been abused by extremists and hate groups. But they have also created a world of new communities and opportunities.

For me, it is all a reminder of the power of individuals to change the world.

After all, people power helped make the 2030 Agenda the most inclusive development process of our time. People power mobilized millions to push leaders to take climate action.

People power is what I have seen in every corner of the world this past decade.

People like Rebecca Johnson, a nurse I met in Sierra Leone who contracted Ebola, recovered and then risked her life again to save her community.

People like Yusra Mardini, the Syrian teen swimmer who pushed her damaged refugee boat to safety and then went on to compete in the Olympics.

And, of course, people like young Malala Yousafzai, who came to the United Nations and showed us all how one book, one pen and one person can make a difference.

Excellencies,

A perfect world may be on the far horizon.

But a route to a better world, a safer world, a more just world, is in each and every one of us.

Ten years on, I know that together, united, we can get there.

Thank you.