



**OPENING REMARKS OF H.E. VOLKAN BOZKIR
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
GENERAL DEBATE
(22 SEPTEMBER 2020, GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL)**

Heads of State and Government,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished Ministers and delegates,

Excellencies,

I am honored to welcome you all, to the General Debate of the seventy-fifth Session of the General Assembly.

I would like to take a moment, to commemorate this historic occasion.

This Hall, has been the background of many significant discussions.

Here, in this Hall, the General Assembly has accomplished much.

We have reached consensus, and we have resolved difficult problems.

This Hall symbolizes, what the nations can accomplish, when they are united.

And here, in this Hall, the General Debate has been the apex of our deliberations.



The General Debate, and the High-Level Week, enable our political and civil society leaders, to come together, and discuss the various challenges we face.

Some of these challenges are local, or regional. But our efforts are always global.

Excellencies,

This year, in this Hall, the General Debate has had to take a new form.

The leaders of our nations, are not personally present.

They will not be able, to interact with each other, and have bilateral meetings on the sidelines.

And there is limited opportunity, to benefit from NGO participation.

But, our need for deliberation, is higher than ever.

The pandemic has affected, far more than our ability to attend this Debate in person. It has pummeled our economies.

It has pushed our healthcare systems, to their limits.

Education, has been disrupted, risking our collective future.

The most vulnerable have suffered most.



The already precarious situation of refugees and migrants, is ever more dire.

The women and girls, face higher risks of exposure, to gender-based violence and exploitation.

Children, are more at risk of child labour, child marriage and trafficking.

Xenophobia, racism and discrimination, on ethnic and religious grounds, are on the rise.

Violence, against members of religious groups and places of worship, have been increasing.

I wish to extend my sympathy and solidarity, to each and every individual, who has been impacted by this virus.

And on behalf all these people, I want to make a call:

Rarely has the whole of humanity faced, such an imminent and common threat.

Today, we must leave our differences and disagreements aside.

Today, we must renew our collective commitment to multilateralism.

Today, we must combine our efforts to address this global problem, and we must make sure that, “no one is left behind”.

“We, the peoples of the United Nations” can achieve this.



Excellencies,



When we consider the potential of the United Nations, it is important to consider this Organization's origins.

Following the heinous acts of World War II, the establishment of the UN, was an acknowledgement, that we must do better.

It was a collective commitment, to the progress of humanity.

Through a new rules-based world order, with an Organization of unrivalled legitimacy at its center, our founders endeavored to ensure peace, prosperity and progress for all.

The system was designed to be flexible, so we can address a range of challenges and unexpected issues.

To recover from the pandemic, we can plan, innovate and build back better, for a sustainable, inclusive and just recovery.

Doing this alone, will cost more lives and more resources.

The pandemic, will continue to change, how we operate over the next year.

We must make full use, of all the tools available to us, to combat this challenge.

And a key platform to provide political guidance to our efforts at the international level is, this very Assembly, where we all sit today, the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations.



In this regard, I urge Member States to be cooperative and creative, to devise solutions, that will enable this body to function effectively, and remain relevant, within the bounds of the Charter and Rules of Procedure.

Excellencies,

Since 1945, our demands of the United Nations system have grown immeasurably.

Today, the United Nations supports international peace and security, in some of the world's most volatile regions, with its force of 95,000 peacekeepers, in 13 operations around the world.

It coordinates an appeal of tens of billions of US Dollars , to meet the humanitarian needs of tens of millions of people around the world.

It supplies vaccines, to 50% of the world's children, preventing the spread of disease, and saving 3 million lives a year.

The Human Rights Council, and the treaty body system, is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights, around the globe.

The pandemic, has only increased our demands on the system.

To meet them, the Organization, and this General Assembly in particular, will need to enhance coordination, coherence, efficiency and delivery capacity, within its work and in relation to other organs.



We must adapt, making space for further engagement among them, across the three pillars of our work.

We must continue, to strengthen the efforts of UN agencies, including the World Health Organization, to combat this pandemic.

We must be prepared, to have tough, honest conversation, about where the multilateral system is failing, or where it is not adapting fast enough, to the ever-evolving challenges we face.

And we need to act to implement the necessary reforms, to ensure that the UN is fit for purpose, and can deliver the future we want.

Excellencies,

In our efforts, let us put the people we serve front and centre. Our UN Charter, is a product of ‘we the peoples of the United Nations’. Let us consider these people as individuals, with varied circumstances and challenges, hopes and dreams.

Let us think about an IDP, who was finally able to start school at age 11. Her education is now being threatened by the pandemic, as schools shut down, and families face increasing economic hardship.

Let us picture a refugee, who lost all her 10 animals to a pulmonary epidemic, impacting financial and nutrition levels for her whole family.

And let us consider, a victim of a terrorist act, who will need long-term physical, psychological, social and financial support, to deal with the trauma.



These people need our helping hand. These people need to see that they are not alone.

The people we serve, recognize, that the multilateral system is the best system available, to provide solutions to complex issues, such as climate change, peace and security, human rights protections and global pandemics.

With the individuals we serve at the forefront, let me now outline my priorities for this Session, that I hope you will support.

Firstly, as we commemorate the UN's 75th anniversary, we must recommit to and strengthen multilateralism and acknowledge its achievements. The UN is the world's foremost forum, to address issues that transcend national boundaries, maintain international peace and security, promote sustainable and inclusive development and protect human rights.

Multilateralism is essential, to fulfil the core mandates of our Organization, prescribed in its Charter.

To do that, we must continue to seek ways, in order to establish and consolidate trust and cohesion, among members, groups of countries and other stakeholders.

Today, the world is seeing rising levels of mistrust and rivalry between major powers. International institutions succeed, when they manage to mediate such tensions. The UN was born, with this in mind. It is in the interests of the world, our economies and our people that, these tensions are managed and do not spiral out of control. The forum provided by the UN, is critical to reinforce cooperation and consensus.



Secondly, I will endeavor to advance the humanitarian agenda of our Organization, in view of the unprecedented level of humanitarian needs, which are caused by prolonged and new conflicts, as well as natural disasters around the world.

We currently serve over 100 million people, including many refugees in my own country and other countries, who have fled the devastating wars.

Our efforts, must ensure that, the most vulnerable are protected, and able to live in dignity, as set out in the UN Charter. The pandemic, has only intensified existing vulnerabilities and inequalities.

We must work doubly hard, to protect these already vulnerable populations, from further hardship.

We have a collective responsibility, to demonstrate, that we can deliver, especially for those in the most-dire situations.

I will use my Presidency, to highlight the importance of, impartial and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid, and full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law in conflicts, and crises.

I would also like to take this moment, to recognize the admirable dedication of UN personnel, who operate in some of the world's most difficult circumstances, and are a critical driving force of this organization's success.

Thirdly, Sustainable Development Goals, are the most transformative set of objectives, yet they cannot be achieved without strengthened global partnership.



As we begin the Decade of Action, and Delivery for implementation of the SDGs, all of us, member states, international financial organizations, private sector and civil society, need to renew efforts, to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Despite hard-won gains, we are not on track to meet all 17 of the SDGs by 2030.

The pandemic has affected all countries, large and small, north and south. It has, however, hit hardest the countries that are already vulnerable.

We must ensure that, our efforts to recover from the pandemic, are fully aligned with the implementation of the SDGs. If we are to uphold our pledge, “to leave no one behind”, we must redouble our efforts, in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular attention to the needs of the countries in special situations, including the LDCs. COVID vaccines, must be distributed fairly and equitably.

And finally, on gender equality, despite the enormous gains that have been made, gender inequality remains deeply entrenched in many societies.

Women often lack access to decent work, equal pay, quality education and adequate health care.

They suffer from violence and discrimination, and are often under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.

As we recover from the pandemic, we must build back better, to improve the lives of women and girls. We must renew our commitment, to protect women’s rights and make



women's participation in peace, security and humanitarian action meaningful and sustained.

The high-level meeting to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, will mark the beginning of our work this session, to address the deeply entrenched inequality, which permeates society, and holds back the progress, of not just half, but all of our population.

Excellencies,

Three-quarters of a century ago, the founders of our Organization, demonstrated fortitude, at a time of crisis.

They chose, to trust one another, and unite in pursuit of a better world.

Together, we have overcome adversity, and challenges.

Let us draw strength, from those who have persevered in the past.

When we have worked together, humanity has prevailed.

As we tackle the pandemic, poverty, inequality, climate change and many other global challenges, I implore you to remember two points:

- Firstly, to use this Organization to its fullest potential.
- And secondly, to come together for the benefit of all.



I wish you every success in these worthy endeavors.

I have full faith that you will do your utmost to continue to serve the people you are privileged to represent.

As the President of this body, I stand ready to facilitate your efforts.

This Assembly have the power, to create a better world for all.

This has been a historical year already.

And together, we will make this Session, a historical success.

Thank you very much.