

Speech by President Charles Michel at the UN General Assembly

Nadia Murad was born in Iraq. She is a Yazidi. On 15 August 2014, her world was turned upside down: jihadists attacked her village. Six of her brothers were murdered before her eyes. She saw her mother for the last time. She was captured and became a sexual slave, subjected to the most vile abuse. But in the end, she escaped. Today, Nadia Murad is a Nobel Peace Laureate and she is fighting unrelentingly for the rights and dignity of women.

And I will take this opportunity to quote her: *"Today, we are seeing the price of conflict marked on women's bodies in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Tigray and in so many other places... So much potential is lost if we ignore the power of women in conflict prevention and in rebuilding communities..."* End of quote.

I met Nadia Murad. I saw in her eyes all the strength of humanity. I heard, in the softness of her voice, utter determination. She decided to draw, from tragedy and endless suffering, an unshakeable strength with which to transform the world.

And it is with that inspiration that I address you here today.

The European Union was forged by Europeans. Like an irrepressible surge of dignity and freedom after two bloody world wars.

Today we face another turning point in human history. Because we are entrenched in another war – a global war. This global war has no opposing sides. No armies. And no land is lost or conquered. Yet, this war destroys lives. Brings countries to their knees. And unimaginable suffering to families.

I am talking about the war that humans have waged against nature. We have tortured our planet. Abused our natural resources. We have committed acts of war against our environment. And now ... nature is fighting back. Bringing us back to our senses. Back to humility.

No one can say: "I didn't know". For decades, scientists have sounded the alarm. But their warnings fell on deaf ears. We turned away, so as not to see. And today, the shock is brutal.

We are reaping what we have sown.

The fires that have devastated Australia. The droughts that have ravished Africa. The floods that have scarred Europe. And the hurricanes that have battered the United States.

And there is another scourge that has afflicted our planet ... for nearly 2 years. This also predicted by science. COVID-19. It has killed 4.5 million people. And shattered the lives of billions more.

But this pandemic has also led us back to the essential: life and human dignity. To safeguard these, we have taken exceptional measures: massive confinements that have brought our economies, our social lives and, most seriously, our freedoms to a near standstill.

This pandemic has opened our eyes to the obvious – our lives and our health are inextricably linked to the health of our fields, forests, oceans and fauna.

We share this planet with other living beings. It is time to stop waging war against our natural world. It is time for humans to sign an armistice with nature. A peace treaty with our planet. And with the generations to come.

It is time for us to transform the world, just as the previous generation did after the last World War.

Inspired by these principles, they left us an international order based on rules. To promote peace.

They built liberal democracies. To guarantee the dignity of each individual.

They championed a development model based on the freedom to trade and to pursue economic opportunity. To ensure prosperity.

These choices have ushered in progress and greater stability. But the world of yesterday is not that of today. And even less ... the world of tomorrow.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Brutal unilateralism too often elbows out multilateralism. The ambition to dominate creates new dependencies and leads to tensions and conflicts.

Democracies are under pressure, both from within and from without. Authoritarian regimes, openly or not, meticulously undermine the principles of freedom at home, and even beyond their borders.

Finally, our model of economic development has run its course. Its flaws are increasingly visible: the extreme exploitation of resources and increasing inequality. We must escape this vicious circle.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We are indeed at an inflection point. We must ask ourselves: What world do we want for tomorrow?

We want a world inspired by reason. A world that trusts in science. That guarantees the dignity and freedom of every human being. We want a fairer and a safer world.

We want cooperation rather than confrontation. Solidarity rather than isolation. Transparency not secrecy.

And we want loyalty. Honouring our word ... when our word is given.

You can count on the European Union -- to give all our energy, our talent, our effort. And to support the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in full confidence with Secretary General Guterres.

And we will back up our words ... with action.

A fairer world is a world where we are all protected against Covid-19. The European Union has provided massive support for research and developed a major vaccine production capacity. We have exported 700 million doses to 130 countries. Three billion euros have been invested in Covax. But we have to acknowledge that the vaccination gap with developing countries is unacceptable. We still need to act energetically.

We have launched tangible projects: one billion euros has been mobilised to develop pharmaceutical production capacities, including vaccine production capacities, in a number of African countries. We stand ready to support partnerships in Latin America as well.

But overcoming this pandemic is not enough. We need to prevent the next pandemics and build global resilience. To this end, with Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, we have proposed an international treaty on pandemics. I urge everyone to support the starting of negotiations as soon as possible.

A fairer, safer world is a world free of the climate threat. We need to set ambitious goals. The Paris Agreement was a milestone and the European Union was a consequential actor in this. Unlike others, we have steadfastly upheld it. The 27 Member States paved the way by committing to climate neutrality by 2050.

Others are following this example. And in this same spirit, the European Union has decided to raise its objectives for 2030.

We must continue to make headway on international cooperation. To move towards a carbon tax. At our level, we have begun with the emissions trading system (ETS) - an approach which stimulates innovation and produces results.

It is imperative to stimulate investment in greening the economy. We must try to agree on a global approach to establish a regulatory framework for green financing.

Lastly, we are not all equally placed in the race against time where global warming is concerned. Industrialised countries bear a particular responsibility for supporting developing countries. Since the pledge to mobilise 100 billion dollars a year to finance the fight against global warming, few have paid their share.

Between 2013 and 2019, the European Union and its Member States disbursed 127 billion euros, one third of the total. We call upon other partners to honour their pledges as well. It is a question of trust and fairness.

A fairer world, a safer world is also a world in peace. At this very moment, women are being brutalised and raped, because they are women. This weapon of war is employed particularly in the Horn of Africa, in Ethiopia. We call for a ceasefire and an immediate

end to ethnic violence. Unfettered access to humanitarian aid must be guaranteed.

Poverty and radicalism are two scourges which feed off each other. Education, basic services, health and infrastructure are the best remedies for instability and the related dangers.

In the Sahel, the Union European and nine of its Member States are mobilised alongside the local populations. Both in security and defence missions, and in development aid. Restoring State authority and guaranteeing governance are vital to achieving lasting results.

The new situation in Afghanistan is a failure for the international community. And lessons must be learned from it. But one thing is certain: the end of military operations is not the end of Europe's commitment to the Afghan people.

We want to avoid a humanitarian disaster and to preserve as many of the gains of the past 20 years as possible, in particular the rights of women and girls.

The European Union is the leading investor in the Indo-Pacific region and one of the largest trading partners: 40% of our trade passes through the region. We have decided to substantially enhance our cooperation there. This is the basis of the partnership with ASEAN, which is now a strategic partnership.

Security and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean must be guaranteed in accordance with international law. The European Union will shoulder its full responsibility in that regard.

Excellencies,

The European Union will never turn a blind eye to human rights violations. The rule of law, non-discrimination and respect for minorities (including LGBTQI) are core values. This is the essence of the human rights dialogue we are conducting with many countries around the world.

We steadfastly defend our values but we are also prepared to engage and to dialogue in order to rise to global challenges such as the climate, biodiversity and the fight against pandemics.

Dear Leaders and Delegates,

Peace is much more than the absence of war. Peace can never be taken for granted. It has to be worked at every day. It is sustained by the mutual connections between our societies. The more interests we share, the less we come into conflict. Economic, scientific, cultural and intellectual exchanges contribute strongly to stability. And it is fostered by regional or continental integration projects, and by major partnerships between these new integrated areas. Whether they be in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Asia...or Africa.

Together with our African brothers we are working hard to build a new alliance with the continent of Africa. Listening and mutual respect. Consideration for particularities and realities, transparency and good governance on both sides...must be its trademark. We will mobilise the private sector to invest in infrastructure and new technologies. We will support all efforts to promote education - the most effective lever with which to ensure a better future. Our common interests are a strong driver for the success of our partnership's new approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union and our Member States are one of the main economic powers in the world. And we are also the leading sponsor of peace and sustainable development. We finance one quarter of the regular budget of the United Nations. 30% of the total budget for peacekeeping. And half of all global development aid. It is a choice that is consistent with our vision of a world that is open and interconnected.

We have values to promote, citizens to protect and interests to defend. And it is in this spirit that we are developing the strategic autonomy of the European Union, including in our security and defence capabilities.

To be less dependent. To strengthen our positive influence. And to reinforce our Atlantic Alliance, which is anchored in our democratic values and an unshakeable pillar of our security and stability in the world. Stronger allies make for a stronger alliance, underpinned by transparency and loyalty.

Our positive influence is something that we naturally want to further in our immediate neighbourhood. This is the purpose of our Eastern Partnership, which is a long-term commitment with Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is the reason behind our support for the people of Belarus and our firm stance towards Mr Lukashenko's regime. In particular, when he uses migrants as a hybrid weapon to destabilise members of the European Union. And lastly, it is the reason for the work we are doing to strengthen our ties with the Western Balkan countries.

The recent upsurge in violence in the Middle East has been a fresh reminder that it is absolutely essential to resume peaceful

dialogue towards the two-state solution between Israel and Palestine.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Transforming the world. Making it fairer and safer. And protecting the dignity of each individual. This is the United Nations' pledge. Let us all live up to that promise – for all the Nadia Murads of this world and for the generations that will follow us. You can count on the European Union.

Thank you.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press