

UNGA76

National Statement by Ireland, 24 September 2021

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Mr President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished heads of state and governments,

Esteemed heads of delegations,

Mr Secretary-General,

Friends,

This week, in this hall, a series of alarms have sounded:

- they have sounded for conflict;
- they have sounded for COVID;
- they have sounded for climate.

We have heard the alarms – now we must respond.

I believe that this is what the General Assembly – our Assembly of Nations – was created to do - our purpose, our obligation.

The United Nations is a symbol of hope for billions of people around the world.

The UN flag, a beacon of peace across the globe.

The blue helmets, guardians to the most vulnerable.

UN convoys, a lifeline to millions.

The obligation we assume in this hall is to transform that hope, in the face of our common challenges, into a better future for all our peoples.

Mr President,

Today, the climate crisis threatens our very existence on this shared and endangered planet.

The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a shadow over our world.

It has deepened global inequality, even as it has heightened our sense of interdependence.

The people of the world now look to us, to this General Assembly Hall, to act and to lead.

We cannot let them down.

The simple fact is that we cannot succeed in addressing these global challenges without a strong, effective and fair multilateral system.

As we begin to emerge from the shadow of the pandemic, let us do so more united in our resolve, and firm in our conviction that the United Nations delivers for those who rely on it most.

Let us commit to tackling this pandemic together, to make “leave no one behind” more than a mere slogan. In our words, and, more importantly in our deeds.

Mr President,

Vaccine inequity is a moral test for our global community.

The rapid establishment of COVAX and the ACT Accelerator represents multilateralism at its best. I urge all Member States to continue to support the COVAX mechanism. This is the only way we can meet the target of a fully vaccinated world by mid-2022.

Ireland is in the process of donating 1.3 million vaccine doses to low income countries, mainly through COVAX, with a further significant donation planned in 2022. Our support to global health since the outbreak of the pandemic has reached over €200 million.

The World Health Organisation should remain at the heart of our global response to this and future pandemics. However, we must provide it with the political and financial support it needs to do this job. In Ireland, we have quadrupled funding to the WHO in response to the pandemic. We must also consider change, where needed, to strengthen the multilateral architecture on pandemic prevention and response.

Mr President,

When we reflect on the last eighteen months, one thing is clear: the pandemic caught the world off-guard.

It has put into stark relief the simple, and regrettable, fact that

- we have not made sufficient progress in reducing poverty;
- that we have not made sufficient progress in increasing access to quality health care and education;
- nor, in combatting the climate crisis.

Had we made more progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, our societies would have been more resilient, better prepared to weather the storm, and lives would have been spared.

We have less than a decade to achieve these ambitious global goals. We have a rare opportunity now to build back fairer, greener and better. The SDGs provide us with the blueprint. So too, does *Our Common Agenda* – the Secretary-General’s vision for a future of global cooperation through an inclusive,

networked, and effective multilateralism. It is incumbent upon all of us to grasp this moment, to invest in *a better world for all*.

Mr President,

For Ireland, our membership of the European Union has shown us:

- that pooling our sovereignty enhances, not diminishes it;

- that abiding by international law brings immeasurable benefits; and

- that our commitment to multilateralism is not simply a stock phrase to insert into a speech, but is at the heart of who we are as a nation and as a people.

Last year, in my address to this Assembly, I assured you that Ireland was ready to assume its responsibility at the Security Council. A responsibility entrusted to us by you, our fellow members of the General Assembly.

We do not take this responsibility lightly. Our own experience of conflict on the island of Ireland has taught us that building peace is painstaking, long and often frustrating. We expected that our time on the Council would reflect that complexity; would require stamina, ingenuity, compromise and determination. And so it has proved.

Every day for the last nine months, we have sought to use our voice, to defend our principles, and to make progress towards the peaceful resolution of some of the world's most pressing conflicts.

Progress has not always been possible. Too often, the Council has been divided. It is a lesson hard learned that when we, in this building, are divided, it is the most vulnerable who suffer the consequences.

The promise of the Charter is to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. Today, I call on all members of the

Council to set aside political differences and to work to uphold that promise.

Syria presents an urgent example of where this is needed.

This year we marked ten years of conflict in that country.

For many, the conflict in Syria is emblematic as the failure of the United Nations and of the Security Council in particular.

On too many occasions, in the face of immense suffering, the Council chose inaction.

Often, in response, it has been the General Assembly that has stepped up, and stepped in. This body has taken bold action, critical to the resolution of this conflict.

With Norway, Ireland is leading work in the Security Council to ensure that humanitarian aid continues to reach all those who need it in Syria. In July, the Council acted as one when it adopted Resolution 2585. That Resolution ensured the continuation of the vital UN operation, which provides aid to 3.4 million people in North West Syria.

But humanitarian aid cannot be a substitute for political will. What 13 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance require most is a political solution.

Mr. President,

Since January, Ireland has consistently urged the Council to act in response to the deteriorating situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

We have been horrified by reports of gross human rights abuses and violations, including widespread and systematic sexual and gender-based violence. For 10 months, a humanitarian catastrophe has unfolded before our eyes. The threat of famine looms large. This is unconscionable.

We are speaking out clearly here today, as we have done in the Council for months. We must stand firm and united in support of the Secretary-General's call for a negotiated ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian access and restoration of

basic services to all affected areas, and a political solution to the crisis.

Mr. President,

A hallmark of Irish foreign policy is our firm commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons.

Next week at the Security Council, we will mark the 25th anniversary of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

We are committed to achieving a successful and substantive outcome to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

We warmly welcome the entry-into-force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

As Security Council Facilitator for Resolution 2231 on the Iran nuclear deal we have engaged extensively to encourage a return to compliance by all parties.

We welcome the commitment of the US Administration to return to the agreement.

We urge Iran to seize this opportunity, to return swiftly to talks in Vienna, and to come back into full compliance with the agreement, including by cooperating fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Excellencies

The escalation of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in May resulted in more lives lost, including the deaths of more than 70 children.

Ireland was deeply frustrated by the Council's inability to speak throughout this latest outbreak of hostilities. While we welcomed the Press Statement agreed on 22 May, it was too little, too late.

A comprehensive, just and lasting peace *is* possible.

Ireland is committed to achieving a two State solution, with a viable State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, alongside

the State of Israel, living in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

Young people – Palestinians and Israelis – are losing hope that peace can be achieved. As leaders, we must act now.

I call on the international community to come together to renew efforts for a just and lasting resolution, including through a reinvigorated Quartet.

Mr. President, Excellencies

The world has watched in horror at the violence and chaos in Afghanistan.

Millions of Afghans require urgent support, including those recently displaced by conflict, violence and intimidation. Full, safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian organisations and all of their personnel, regardless of gender, must be facilitated.

The most vulnerable – women, girls, boys, men, LGBTQI persons; and persons with disabilities – must be protected.

The situation of Afghan women and girls has been foremost in our thoughts.

Over the last twenty years, Afghan women have asserted their rights, and continue to assert their rights.

These rights include full and equal access to education; the right to health care; the right to freedom of movement in their own country; and the right to participate fully in public life.

Women and girls have been educated in enormous numbers, and have been leading and participating in all aspects of society. They refuse to be silenced, to be erased from public life. Our role and responsibility is to stand with them. So much has been achieved in the past twenty years. There can be no going back.

For all of us in this Hall, we can and must agree that the rights of Afghan women and girls be a non-negotiable principle.

Excellencies,

At its best, United Nations peacekeeping is a remarkable and meaningful expression of multilateralism and international solidarity.

We have always seen this service as a noble and important calling.

For more than six decades, Irish women and men have served. Every village, town and neighbourhood in our island has bid farewell to a blue beret upon deployment and counted the days to their return. Some never made it home.

Today, there are over 500 Irish personnel serving in UN and EU peacekeeping and crisis management operations.

Every person who serves in a blue helmet deserves a mandate that matches the reality of the conflict on the ground, and that resources in turn match mandates. Equally, the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding is a critical moment, when sustainable peace is within our grasp but often times at its most fragile.

Resolution 2594, led by Ireland and adopted unanimously earlier this month by the Council with the support of 97 members of this Assembly, sends a strong and united message that the United Nations is committed to supporting its members through this sensitive juncture on the path to peace. There can be no gaps when it comes to protecting civilians.

Excellencies

In Ireland, we have learned the importance of an inclusive approach to building peace.

Those who make war cannot, and should not, have a monopoly on the terms of peace. It is crucial that women, young people, and civil society – who are often excluded – are at the centre of our shared work to build and maintain peace. The promotion of gender equality, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda is a golden thread throughout our work.

Human rights are universal and indivisible. They belong to us all. We will not falter in calling for full compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law.

We will stand by the International Criminal Court, the cornerstone of the international system of criminal justice.

Excellencies,

Yesterday, I had the privilege to chair a Council debate on climate and security.

As we heard from the Secretary-General on Tuesday, we can no longer deny the reality: climate change is the single greatest challenge facing our generation.

Its impact is devastating on our environment and ecosystems and our collective security is at risk. We have seen, time and time again, that the most catastrophic impacts disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and the least responsible.

We must deliver on the Paris Agreement commitments and we will shortly have important discussions at COP 26. But we can see the adverse effects of climate change already exacerbating conflict and insecurity, compounding other drivers of conflict such as poverty, inequality and human rights violations.

We have ample evidence of this. As Co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security, along with Niger, Ireland has worked throughout the year with our fellow Council members, to better understand these links; to inform the Council as to what steps we can take to address climate-related security risks.

We know not all Council Members are of one mind on this. My hope is that by working together, we can and we will reach a shared understanding of how the Security Council can meet the challenge of climate and security.

There is no time to waste. For this reason, in the coming days, Ireland will convene a discussion on a thematic Security Council resolution on climate and security.

Excellencies,

At COP26, we must all, North and South of this vulnerable planet, muster the courage to take bold and ambitious action.

We need to keep global warming to as close to 1.5° Celsius as possible.

For our part, Ireland will reduce our emissions by 51% by 2030 compared to 2018 levels. Along with our partners in the European Union, we will achieve net neutrality by 2050.

It is also critical that we meet our collective commitment to provide 100 billion dollars in financing to developing countries.

We cannot fail – our future depends on it.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

We can all identify times when we, the United Nations, have fallen short. The UN can only do what we ask of it when we, its members, allow it; when we deliver the resources, the support, the political will and the constructive engagement needed for it to deliver.

As I stand here today, I am reminded of the ambitions, the goals, and the dreams of billions of people. They have placed their trust in us, and they expect us to work together to solve the greatest challenges facing our global community.

We know that with political will, we can be deserving of that trust.

Mr. President,

Ireland will continue to play our part, to build consensus and to advocate fiercely for the multilateral system and the people we have pledged to serve.

Thank you.