

Remarks by H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly

27 September 2021

Heads of State and Government,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished Ministers,

Excellencies,

We began the General Debate last week with my opening remarks, which underscored the need for a ‘Presidency of Hope’.

I recall being hopeful last week for a successful General Debate; hopeful for the safety and security of each of you.

Today I am grateful because we did it. The United Nations has taken its biggest, boldest step yet to emerge from the pandemic.

Excellencies, none of this would have been possible without each of you, and without the support of so many.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your active participation in this seventy-sixth Session of the United Nations General Debate.

I would also like to extend my profound gratitude to our host country – the United States, the City of New York, the New York Police Department, and all the other Departments of the city of New York, for their seamless logistical and security support over the past few weeks. This is no easy task,

and we are grateful to each and every one of you for your relentless and untiring contributions.

I would also like to thank the city of New York and the Mayor's Office for making available vaccines for visiting delegations.

I understand that about **93** attendees were vaccinated, and **843** attendees availed of the free testing facilities offered through the mobile vaccine vans.

New York city, you have been an exceptional host, as always. Our gratitude also goes out to the people of New York who have with open hearts welcomed the delegates back to this vibrant city.

Allow me to also thank our colleagues across the UN Secretariat, and in particular the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, Department of Operational Support, Protocol, Security and Facilities Management who have relentlessly provided us with countless hours of essential support on everything from photography to videography, from interpretation to health, and from diplomatic protocol to medical advice and security.

Finally, I would like to thank each and every member of my team in the OPGA. We come from over 30 plus nationalities and have found a vibe that will keep us spirited to deliver on the year-long agenda that we set for ourselves.

It was a tremendous task to organize a High-Level Week of this magnitude amidst a global pandemic. I am glad that the sound mitigation measures put in place by the Secretariat were closely followed by delegations and we managed to have a successful Debate.

Excellencies, success this past week demonstrates that mitigation measures, combined with high vaccination rates, do indeed work. We must build upon this success and continue momentum.

Going forward, for the upcoming committee session, I want to inform you that, with the cooperation of the Secretariat, a decision has been taken to increase the size of the delegations to 1+3 in the GA Hall and 1+1 in the combined Conference Rooms 1, 2 and 3.

In addition, the Secretariat is making available the Trusteeship Council Chamber and Conference Room 4 with limited seating and interpretation.

Conference Rooms 9, 10, 11, 12 and alphabet rooms with limited seating but without interpretation facilities will also be made available.

The honor system that I had announced in my letter dated 16 September continues.

Excellencies,

Reopening the General Assembly is indeed a success in times like these; yet, our true measure of success remains our willingness and ability to engage in dialogue and to put our faith in the multilateral system.

In that regard, I would like to thank all the leaders who candidly laid out the challenges that we confront and have called for action.

Over the last week we heard from **194** speakers, including **100** Heads of State, **52** Heads of Government, **3** Vice-Presidents, and **34** Ministers.

I, myself held discussions with close to **70** heads of delegations of all levels.

I trust you are as encouraged as I am by the strong showing of our return to in-person diplomacy.

We were all glad to see the halls and cafeterias of the United Nations filled with dialogue, with debate, with laughter, and with compromise. This is the United Nations.

Excellencies,

A great deal was discussed over the last week, but a clear set of issues arose time and again.

COVID-19, including both the recovery process and the need to expedite access to vaccines.

The threat of climate change, the dangers of inaction, and the need for success at COP26.

And peace, security, and the risks of instability.

The fact that each of these issues were so predominant speaks volumes as to what the world wants.

It is now for us, and that of the United Nations system, to address these demands and to do so in a manner that turns every challenge into an opportunity... an opportunity to strengthen multilateralism and deliver results on ground.

There is no time for complacency.

The world is demanding more action and not less.

Excellencies,

Another issue that was spoke about at length – and which was sadly on display – was the deeply poor gender representation at the highest levels of our work.

Only **18** of the **194** speakers this year were women.

Colleagues, we must do more.

I have already held a dedicated discussion with female Heads of State and Government, as well as the European Union, on how to boost gender equality. I thank those leaders who shared their thoughts and reaffirm my commitment to taking forward this advice with concrete actions.

Excellencies,

With high-level meetings planned on COVID, on climate, and on the environment, as well as efforts being made to empower women and girls, and work towards greater youth and CSO participation, the 76th session hopefully will be an active and an inclusive session.

I trust you will join me in this.

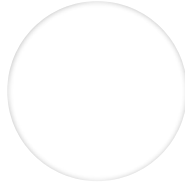
In closing, allow me to point to two truths that were on display this past week, which I hope you will take with you as we leave:

First, we all share the same concerns and the same unwavering commitment to overcome obstacles. However much we may disagree on tactics, our end goal is very much the same.

And second, multilateralism is indeed alive and well. The fact that so many have come, have spoken, have engaged, have deliberated, and have argued, is a sign of a world that continues to believe in dialogue and diplomacy, and that reposes its faith in a United Nations that is able and ready.

Let's derive our hope from these truths and work with a sense of responsibility and determination for the rest of the 76th session.

Excellencies, I thank you.



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Abdulla Shahid

President of the UN General Assembly

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