

76th SESSION OF UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADDRESS BY MR WAVEL  
RAMKALAWAN PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES

Mr President of the United Nations General Assembly,  
Mr Secretary-General of  
the United Nations,  
Heads of State and Government,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I congratulate you on your election as President of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly and convey our deep appreciation to your predecessor for his able leadership during the preceding session.

I wish also to congratulate Mr António Guterres, on his re-appointment for a second term and for his leadership of the United Nations during these unprecedented times.

As we approach the two-year mark since the first case of the COVID-19 virus was recorded, the world continues to struggle with the painful impact of this pandemic.

The pandemic has claimed millions of lives, depleting economies, and shattering communities while disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable.

The past two years have been a stark reminder that the global community has failed to adequately address some of the most pressing issues of our time: effective and equitable access to health-care, glaring inequalities, climate change and environmental degradation, the arms race, endless conflicts, the plight of refugees ... to name but a few.

And here we are, the leaders of the world, standing on this platform today to reflect on how to build back better, stronger and greener.

As we enter the second year of the UN decade of action, it is imperative that we, as a community of nations, take deliberate, collaborative and decisive actions to guarantee a future that leaves no one behind.

In recalling our commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related treaties, let us remind ourselves that the most vulnerable people – those living in dire conditions and facing seemingly insurmountable crises – require special attention and help.

Indeed, while the pandemic has brought about untold suffering, devastated global health systems, severely impacted the world economy and impoverished entire communities, the crisis at hand presents an opportunity to reinvigorate our collective will to bring about positive changes, with emphasis on equitable, sustainable, and inclusive governance.

Our recovery depends on it.

Central to global recovery is the availability and distribution of vaccines. Central to the health and well-being of every human being is solidarity. Statements, good intentions and pledges are woefully inadequate. The facts speak for themselves. Of 554 million doses pledged by the world's richest nations, only 91 million, or 16%, have been delivered. In Africa, less than 3.5% of people across the continent have been vaccinated against Covid-19. The figure is far short of the African CDC's official target of 60% of Africans. It is a disgrace! And it points to a sobering fact. There is a virus far more terrible, far more harrowing than COVID19. It is the virus of inequality! And while the pandemic rages on and the debate continues unabated, and travel advisories of all shades and hues are being issued, humanity is the first casualty.

Especially Africa and many other less developed parts of the world. It is true that no one is safe until we are all safe. COVAX, striving as it is against all odds, can fulfil its mandate only if pledges and commitments made by the richest nations are honoured and not used as short-term leverage in one form and another.

Mr President,

The world's resilience to this pandemic, or to potential future ones, goes beyond the health of our people.

Our efforts should also tackle economic imbalances and inequalities. In this regard, Seychelles urges the international community to assist the world's most vulnerable economies in enhancing their resilience to future shocks.

Seychelles' economy, like that of many other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), was brought to its knees just a few months after the pandemic hit, as we witnessed the near total collapse of our tourism industry. For us, this meant forgoing some of our hard-earned economic gains in order to implement contingency plans, focused on protecting our population.

The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the inadequacies in responding to it, underscore the urgent need for stronger collective measures among member states of the United Nations.

It is imperative that we work together to build consensus and cohesion in respect of the plight of those facing threats of an existential nature, most notably SIDS.

Our vulnerabilities are well known and they need not be expounded on here. What needs to be stressed, however, is that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to debt relief and concessionary financial flows is

certainly not the most appropriate for us. An approach and a strategy, which take into account our vulnerabilities and characteristics, would bolster our own efforts to weather the present crisis and to strengthen our capabilities to recover and rebound from the economic fallout caused by the pandemic.

The application of the Vulnerability Index, therefore, remains for us, the only coherent and viable approach and strategy to resolving our current predicament.

Most SIDS have achieved middle to high-income status through hard work and commitment for the betterment of our peoples, but it appears that we are being penalised for our success, penalised for our achievements and hard work. Are the international financial institutions taking our vulnerabilities into consideration? The review of the criteria to measure development support and access to funding is still being debated incessantly in countless fora, with no end in sight. Lack of effective and appropriate global support for SIDS will have systemic consequences on our progress on practically all Sustainable Development Goals.

Furthermore, SIDS continue to be disproportionately affected by what can be best termed as environmental injustice as a result of climate change. We are the least responsible for it, yet we pay the heaviest tribute. The challenge we face to climate change and our response to it will continue long after we have brought COVID-19 under control. We are morally obligated to those who have lost their lives to the calamitous climate and biodiversity crises. We are accountable to those who face constant existential threats. And we owe it to future generations to find lasting solutions to protect this planet.

But despite the enormity of the peril that we face, I remain hopeful that together we will find solutions. It requires practical solutions from around the globe that would lead us towards a sustainable, greener world powered by a clean energy economy. However, pledges and commitments are just not enough.

They must be respected and honoured. In the light of the upcoming COP26, Seychelles calls on the international community, particularly the larger emitters and economies of the G20, to increase their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to a level that meets, if not surpasses the requirements of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report and averts the global catastrophe that threatens all of us.

Mr President, The pandemic and worsening climate crisis have added to the other difficult tasks of the United Nations. We must more than ever renew our commitment to multilateralism and reinforce the functions of United Nations. Let us be guided by the UN Charter as we move together to rebuild a greener world, leaving no one, particularly the most vulnerable, behind.

I believe in the founding principles of the United Nations; that multilateralism is key to ensuring prosperity and lasting peace. Let us restore hope and belief in the UN, by restoring hope and belief in ourselves and in international solidarity. Let us rebuild trust in one another by bridging the inequality gaps within and between nations, reducing marginalisation, eradicating racism, xenophobia and all other forms of discrimination, and instilling tolerance among our peoples.

Never have we, as a community of nations, been beset with challenges of the present magnitude. But there is hope. Hope that we can overcome them. There is hope that we can overcome the challenges that we face through collective action, global solidarity and with political will. As the leader of one of the smallest nations of the world, I strongly believe in the capacity of our people, especially our youth. I believe, above all, in the capacity of humanity. I believe in our capacity to do good. Together, as the representatives of our planet we can do what is expected of us.

We can do good!

Thank you.