

Statement by Denmark at the General Debate

Delivered by Ms. Helle Thorning-Schmidt,
Prime Minister of Denmark,
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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite our aspirations to create a more just and peaceful world, atrocities continue to take place.

Every day, we witness expressions of the darker side of human nature:

Thousands of innocent civilians besieged on a mountain in northern Iraq by heavily armed extremists.

A Syrian dictator who bombs and starves his own people, leaving more than 10 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Persecution of people because of their religious or political beliefs, their gender or sexual orientation.

Disrespect for national borders, challenging the basic principles on which our rules-based international order is built.

Climate change causing great risks to human health, global food security, and economic development and to the natural resources on which much of our prosperity depends.

A world of more than 7 billion people with increasing demand for key resources and an unsustainable pattern of consumption and production.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenges, we face are complex. There are no simple solutions. What is required of us is strong, collective international action. Not only to manage the crises and conflicts of today. But to prevent the crises of tomorrow.

I am a true believer in international cooperation, and in the virtues of the United Nations. But as the world changes and we are faced with new challenges, we must find new ways to adapt.

I am confident that we will. But only if we have a strong United Nations. And only if we act together.

As member states each one of us must fulfill our obligations under the Charter. This is our common commitment and our shared responsibility.

I see three challenges where we, the United Nations, should act – and act now. Urgency is key.

First, we need stronger international cooperation and action on peace and security.

Second, we have to reach an ambitious international agreement on climate change next year in Paris.

Third, we have to agree on the post-2015 Agenda for sustainable development.

First, international peace and security.

This past year, we have seen the rise of violent and intensifying conflict fuelled by extremism, in particular the horrific and brutal terrorist actions of ISIL.

ISIL represents a distorted political ideology that must be confronted, degraded and defeated by the entire international community, including countries in the region.

As we are gathered this week, the member states of the United Nations are sending a clear message that we utterly condemn ISIL's cowardly acts of terror. That we are unified in our firm resolve to oppose and confront its violent and extremist ideology. And let it be clear that we are determined to support the Iraqi Government in protecting its people.

Denmark will stand up for our common values as enshrined in the UN charter. And Denmark will support the victims of ISIL's atrocities.

We take part in the humanitarian relief efforts in Northern Iraq. And we will continue our active contribution to the international efforts to support Iraq in the fight against ISIL.

To stop the advance of ISIL, it is adamant to end the flow of foreign fighters and financing from the outside. This is indeed a common obligation.

It is also critical that we address the root causes of violent extremism and improve the conditions in Syria that ISIL has been able to exploit.

The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to be a great concern. Though progress is difficult, we must spare no effort to seek a political solution leading to a transition from the current regime.

There is always a risk that political transition is exploited by violent extremists.

Still, history shows that democratic and inclusive governments, open societies and the fundamental respect for human rights remains the only viable path towards stability, security and prosperity for our citizens.

Bringing an end to the violence in the region will require a sustained and comprehensive contribution from every one of us.

The successful removal of Assad's chemical weapons clearly demonstrated what can be achieved when we join forces in decisive international action. A coalition of Denmark, Norway, Russia, China, Finland, United Kingdom, and the US effectively secured and destroyed these horrendous weapons of war.

Our unified response is also required against another increasing threat.

The Ebola epidemic has become a severe humanitarian, social and economic crisis for countries in West Africa.

If we fail to act now, it may develop into a global health crisis, impacting millions of people.

If so, we will not only be confronted with a health crisis, but also a threat to international peace, prosperity and security.

Clearly, this challenge cannot be tackled by any one nation alone. We must all lend our support. The United Nations and its member states have a common responsibility to bring Ebola under control.

Ebola is not just a regional challenge. It has become a global crisis.

Denmark is committed to this cause. We have already contributed to the international response, including the UN humanitarian air service. And we will increase our support. Today I can announce that Denmark will provide a maritime transport capacity to the UN. We will support the construction of needed housing facilities for international health personnel in the affected countries. And we will provide additional funding to the WHO.

As the situation evolves, we will be ready to consider additional steps.

The global community is based on international law. This law must be respected and not blatantly violated as we have seen in the past year.

We have witnessed an unacceptable foreign intervention in Ukraine. Fundamental principles of national sovereignty and non-interference have been disrespected.

The recent ceasefire is an important step on the only viable way forward - a political solution. Yet we have to see Russia's commitment demonstrated in action – and not only in words. Throughout this conflict, Russia's self-proclaimed support to the peace process has been in stark contrast to realities on the ground.

We remain fully committed to a political solution that respects Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Respect for international law and human rights should always be at the very core of peace and development - as should the Rule of Law and good governance.

That is why Denmark strongly supports bold and significant new steps in the UN such as the Secretary General's recent Rights Up Front initiative.

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention against Torture.

Together with Chile, Ghana, Indonesia, and Morocco, Denmark has launched a global, long term initiative for the universal ratification and implementation of the Convention. We have made significant progress. But we also need to do more to protect men and women from torture and ill-treatment in all parts of the world.

My second point is about the need to advance our collective answer to the challenges of climate change.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege, together with the Premier of Greenland, of hosting a visit by the Secretary-General to Greenland.

We travelled by dog sleighs on the receding ice. And we heard the stories told by the local population about how these changes are affecting local livelihoods.

Climate change is painfully visible in the Arctic. This is beyond discussion. And let there be no illusion that climate change will only have regional impact. The changes will affect each and everyone on the Planet.

Ambitious action is required of us now. One crucial step would be a global binding agreement to reduce CO2 emissions in Paris next year.

Since 2010, Denmark has dedicated 350 million US Dollars to climate action. This year alone, we will commit more than 100 million.

But Governments cannot do this alone. We need to engage the private sector and other partners to ensure adequate climate finance and to foster innovation and green solutions.

Some fear that the green transition will limit economic growth. But this is not necessarily so.

The Danish economy has grown by 40 per cent since 1990 while total emissions have decreased by 20 per cent in that same period. In other words: It is possible to de-link economic growth from increased emissions.

At the Secretary-General's Climate Summit yesterday, world leaders expressed their commitment to address these issues.

Now is the time to deliver on that commitment.

The third and final area where Denmark sees an urgent need for action is on the Post-2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As stated by the Secretary-General: "Ours is the first generation that can wipe poverty from the face of the earth".

This is not a message based on wishful thinking. This is based on the facts. It is within reach. And it has to be done.

Over a twenty-year period from 1990-2010, 700 million people have been lifted out of extreme poverty. Child mortality has been reduced by almost 50 per cent.

Ninety per cent of children in developing regions are now attending primary school.

This represents truly historic progress. But much still needs to be achieved.

The Millennium Development Goals were formulated almost 15 years ago. The world has developed rapidly since.

Clearly, the new set of sustainable development goals must address and integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development.

Another important factor is to ensure women's empowerment, gender equality and the rights of women and girls. This includes sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In too many places, these fundamental rights are not observed.

Women and young girls must have the right to decide freely whether they want to have children, when, how many, and with whom.

And all young people must have access to proper education.

Two hundred years ago, compulsory education was introduced in my country. Education for the many and not just for the few has been a primary driver to transform Denmark into a democratic and prosperous nation. And education has also been a driver of gender equality – and still is.

This is one aspect of the post-2015 agenda that is particularly close to my heart.

I have been proud to be one of the Secretary-General's Champions for his Global Education First Initiative. One of our key priorities must be to ensure quality education also for the most disadvantaged groups and in the most vulnerable countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we look at the global landscape today, insecurity is sadly on the rise. And we all know who is paying the price.

Today, for the first time since the end of World War II, more than 50 million people around the world are displaced due to conflict and violence. Far too many of these are children.

We need a United Nations that can help mediate, prevent, and resolve armed conflicts and that promotes universal respect for human rights.

We need a United Nations that is committed to act against climate change.

And we need a United Nations that can help deliver sustainable development for all and that provides effective assistance to countries suffering from the ebola virus.

But the UN can do nothing without the collective political will of us - its member states.

The world needs a UN that adapts to new challenges and reflects the changing global political realities. Denmark supports a reformed Security Council that fulfils its primary purpose and responsibility when peace and security is threatened.

We need a United Nations based on the strong values and the obligations enshrined in the UN Charter.

And more than ever, we need a United Nations that acts.

Thank you.