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Address to the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

H.E. Mark Rutte

Prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

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Mr President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
fellow delegates,
ladies and gentlemen,

On 17 July, in a summer already marked by alarming reports from Syria, Iraq and Gaza, our country was confronted with stark international reality. The 298 passengers of flight MH17 would be alive today if not for the Crimea conflict and the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine. 196 of the victims were Dutch nationals.

This tragedy has had an enormous impact on our country. So many innocent men, women and children. Entire families ripped from neighbourhoods, empty desks in offices and schools, teammates gone forever. Everyone in the Netherlands knew someone in that plane, directly or indirectly, and we will feel the pain for years to come. Some of the victims still haven't been identified, and this must be done as soon as possible. Nothing is more important to their loved ones, wherever in the world they may be.

This summer we were reminded again of how closely interwoven events at home and abroad can be. And how important a stable world order is to our national interests. We saw again that when it comes to addressing the major problems facing the global community, there is simply no alternative to working together and taking a multilateral approach. This is the firm conviction of the Dutch government.

We are grateful for the wide support for Security Council resolution 2166. All remains and personal belongings need to be repatriated. The cause of the MH17 disaster must be brought to light and those responsible must be brought to justice. Unhindered access to the crash site is therefore essential. The Dutch government is fully committed to achieving these goals, working with all the countries and organisations involved.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands contains a unique article that says: 'The Government shall promote the development of the international legal order'. This self-imposed responsibility comes from a long tradition of freedom, respect for the rule of law and our country's international orientation. In March 2014 we put this principle into practice once again when we hosted the Nuclear Security Summit, a conference on an important topic that must remain high on the international agenda.

The events of this summer have made us even more resolute about promoting the international legal order. And about working to this end with everyone in this General Assembly, in the knowledge that peace, justice and development are closely interconnected.

2015 is an important year for the global development agenda. We will be reviewing the Millennium Development Goals and raising the bar once again. In July the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals laid a solid foundation for the future that reflects the Netherlands' priorities. The most important goal is to eradicate extreme poverty within a generation in a way that doesn't harm economic growth, social equality or the environment. We must link short-term goals with long-term goals.

And despite the progress made, we know that fragile states, where the rule of law barely exists, had no chance of achieving the Millennium Goals. In 2013 there were more displaced people in conflict regions

than ever before. For these reasons the Netherlands applauds the Open Working Group's intention to include peace and the rule of law in the new framework.

We welcome the initiative by the SG to establish the UN mission for ebola emergency response. The Netherlands will substantially increase its humanitarian aid. Part of that effort is a new contribution of 18 mln euros devoted to fighting ebola.

In the same vein, the Netherlands will continue to support and participate in UN peacekeeping missions. We currently have military personnel and relief workers serving in Mali, South Sudan and elsewhere. The upcoming review of peacekeeping missions is an opportunity to improve this instrument and make it more effective. The Netherlands believes that major progress can be made on this front by further integrating the three Ds: defence, development and diplomacy.

Our commitment to fulfilling Security Council resolution 1325 remains firm too. Because women's leadership is essential to achieving peace and security. The important role that women play as change agents in politics, economic development and society cannot be emphasised enough.

As host country to many international legal institutions, including the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, the Netherlands feels a special responsibility with respect to international law. When innocent people fall victim to impunity, human rights violations and the violence of war, the international community cannot and should not just stand by and watch. Perpetrators must be brought to justice, however complex and time-consuming the process may be.

We owe this not only to the passengers of flight MH17, but also to the victims of violence in Syria and Iraq. The horrifying images of mass executions and beheadings in the region are burned into our memories. They impress upon us how important it is for the Security Council and international legal institutions to be able to act boldly and decisively.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands, your partner for peace, justice and development, is a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in 2017 and 2018. We want to help modernise and strengthen this important UN body. Renewal is needed to ensure its effectiveness and legitimacy. The Security Council must be able to act in a crisis. When mass atrocities are being committed somewhere in the world, veto power should be exercised with greater restraint. We salute the French initiative in this regard.

We also believe that the Security Council's authority and resolve would be enhanced if the UN member states were more broadly represented. This is especially true of the African states, which in our opinion are underrepresented.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dag Hammarskjöld once said in this assembly that the principles of the Charter of the United Nations '[...] are, by far, greater than the Organization in which they are embodied, and the aims which they are to safeguard are holier than the policies of any single nation or people.'

The Netherlands shares this conviction and remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting the international legal order, as our Constitution demands.

Thank you.