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A D D R E S S

of the

President of the Republic of Poland

H.E. Mr. Bronisław KOMOROWSKI

**during the General Debate of the 69th Session
of the UN General Assembly**

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**Address of the President of the Republic of Poland at the 69th Session of the
UN General Assembly
25th September 2014**

Mister Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

First, I extend my congratulations to Minister Sam Kutesa for being elected to the honourable post of Chairman of the Session.

Mister Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

In the opening sentences of our Charter, we read that the United Nations was set up to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights (...) in the equal rights (...) of nations large and small”. In the year marking the one hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the first world war and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the second world war, the message of these words holds a particular resonance for us – Poles and Europeans, and all the societies affected by these tragedies. Both world wars took place on Polish land, and the second was started by the aggression of Nazi Germany collaborating with the Soviet Union. Our past compels us to reflect on these words from the Charter and these events from the 20th-century history. This process of reflection accompanies decision-making on a national level, and is similarly binding for the entire international community gathered together in the United Nations.

The first world war bolstered the dream of a world without war. This belief and that general will bore fruit in the League of Nations, the first system of collective security in the history of humanity. It contained all the premises needed to make a positive mark on history, and to maintain peace and security. Its functioning was based on important rules prohibiting war and urging the

peaceful settlement of disputes. The league had common organs, disarmament conferences, and an international judiciary.

Nevertheless, despite all these institutions, we could not create the world without wars. The League later became an easy target, if not an object of ridicule. Yet it was not actually the League that failed. It was let down by its members, and primarily the powers that were entrusted with special responsibility for the implementation of its principal task. The powers of the time failed to pass the test in the face of the expansion of left and right totalitarianisms. The first world war had a share in the emergence of communism, national socialism and many militaristic dictatorships. Those systems fed on conflict, as ideological war, war against other nations – war against another man – was a part of their identity.

Those threats could have been held back on time, yet the democratic world failed, opting for the short-sighted policy of appeasement and the satisfaction of dictatorships' appetites at the cost of the weaker states. The price paid for these acts of negligence was the second world war, and all of humanity had to pay a price that earlier would have been unimaginable. It was from the horrible experience of that war, from the experience of the Shoah, that the legal notion of genocide stems. Its originator and the author of the Genocide Convention itself was a Polish lawyer, Rafał Lemkin, who foresaw the criminal nature of both the totalitarianisms even before the second world war.

After the hecatomb of war, the international community decided to build a system of collective security once again. I am glad that next year we will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations. There are very few who remember the world without our organisation, and it would be difficult to imagine the world without its activity.

During the nearly seven decades of its existence, the United Nations has shown the track record of beautiful achievements and yet also numerous failures. Today, however, the situation is especially worrying, as the symptoms of the phenomena that once brought about the fall of the League of Nations come to light. We stand nowadays in the face of a renaissance of superpowers , a return to thinking in the categories of geopolitical zones of influence that have already led the international community into the morass of hatred, confrontation, and conflict. The United Nations should remain vigilant when faced with a return of such stances and should not tolerate any departure from the security and international relations principles agreed in the Charter. Tolerance toward such stances always ends badly and not infrequently leads to catastrophe.

Mister Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

One needs to emphasise with all might that the occupation of Crimea and aggression in Ukraine is a violation of standards of international law and runs roughshod over the fundamental values of the United Nations. The ideological background of the conflict is the return to the rhetoric from the first half of the previous century, a return to the logic of zones of influence, the logic of the law of the mightier, and the ruthless imperial domination over weaker neighbours, who are allegedly obliged to be obedient satellites of a power performing a revision of the foundations of the civilised international order.

The Security Council, the organ responsible for peace, proved to be ineffective when faced with conflicts in Ukraine and other regions of the world, partly due to the rules of its operation. We are threatened by further plunging into powerlessness if such rules are not amended. It is good that the General Assembly rose to the challenge in resolution number 68/262 of 27 March, 2014, took the side of the weaker party targeted by an act of imperial aggression.

Mister President, Distinguished Delegates,

I feel all the more sad and concerned uttering these words, since we are celebrating the 25th joyful anniversary of the abolishment of communism and the collapse of the Soviet bloc in Poland and other countries of the region. This “spring of nations”, the second in the history of Europe, brought freedom to the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, and respect for human rights and good governance. At the time, changes for the better took place throughout Europe, and even worldwide. The Iron Curtain fell, and so did the bipolar division of the world. The cold war confrontation, together with its accompanying threats of nuclear conflict, became things of the past. That historical change began in Poland with the establishment of the Solidarity civic movement, a movement of peaceful opposition against totalitarian oppression and violation of nations’ rights. The victorious parliamentary elections of 4th June brought about the setting up of the first non-Communist government in our part of Europe since the second world war on 12th September 1989 – the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

Just two weeks later, on 25th September, precisely 25 years ago, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in that new government, Professor Krzysztof Skubiszewski, addressing the delegates to the session of the United Nations General Assembly from this rostrum, proclaimed that new Poland would not respect the logic of zones of influence. He further revealed that we would respect existing treaties and obligations and that we would respect the security interests of other states, yet none of these should result in any limitations concerning choosing or changing the polity system.

This new logic of international relations has brought plenty of good to Europe, where a great wave of unification has been set in motion thanks to the strengthening of the mechanisms of integration of the European Communities and their expansion across many new states. In our region, the European Union is a synonym for peace. It was established so that there would be no more wars on a continent that had previously been famous for them. And indeed, the European Union has become a guarantor of peace in Europe and far beyond its borders. Poland has contributed to this activity in a highly active manner.

We had the right to hope that the benefits of the end of divisions in Europe and of the logic of imperial zones of influence would be shared by an ever greater number of states and nations, and not only those in Europe. That they would be able to decide democratically about their fate, and build their lives in peace and prosperity, free from external domination. We have hoped and hope for a democratic modernisation of Russia.

What happened six months ago in Eastern Europe dealt a blow to that hope and threatened security on our continent. In our part of Europe, people are again asking themselves whether war as a method of obtaining a political goal will also be the European long-term reality. We cannot acquiesce to the brutalisation of international life, anywhere in the world. All the more we cannot acquiesce to it in Europe – the continent that keeps on healing the wounds of the two world wars.

Yet wars and conflicts are also continuing in other parts of our globe, and are incurring countless victims, suffering, and destruction. We have all been surprised by the swiftness of development of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The brutality of the actions of its fighters, who are murdering and persecuting people of other faiths, including those who profess Islam, must

inspire terror and trigger a response from the international community. Their barbarism is a challenge for all of humanity, irrespective of religion, ethnic origin, or political views. We, the states faithful to the United Nations Charter cannot shirk responsibility for providing security. We are responsible for protecting those threatened by cruel violence. Yet everything must be done to ensure that the actions we take follow the United Nations Charter.

We express our concern and pain caused by the conflicts and tragedies suffered by civilians in Syria, Libya, Israel, and the Gaza Strip, and in many African states. All these conflicts, and to an even greater degree the civil wars in some African countries, are accompanied by humanitarian catastrophes. The United Nations, and especially the superpowers that can influence the participating parties, should do everything to stop them.

Nobody could ever take the place of the United Nations and UN agencies in providing aid to refugees and other victims of these humanitarian dramas. On behalf of Poland, I hereby express appreciation for them and recognition for the thousands of courageous members of humanitarian organisations, agencies of our organisation, and non-governmental organisations who hurry to the aid of those who suffer persecution amid all the dangers, frequently at the cost of their own lives. They help those whose security and health is threatened, those left alone, without a roof over their heads, those who are far away from homes to which – due to the destruction – many of them will never be able to return. An ever increasing number of people are experiencing suffering and cruelty linked to the military conflicts. This horrifying trend must be stopped.

Mister Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

If in so many places we are witness to conflicts that entail the death of thousands of people and humanitarian dramas, this happens as a rule due to a failure to

observe fundamental human rights. Entire communities and nations are denied influence over political decisions. Power without control is in most cases, corrupt and self-loving, incapable of lifting countries out of underdevelopment and poverty. This is the background to the conflicts and rebellions in Ukraine, Iraq, Libya, and in many other places in the world. That is why we must increase our efforts to help by offering developmental assistance with social, economic, and political transformation. Otherwise the only alternative to dictatorship could be chaos.

Poland is especially attached to the role of democracy in the life of nations, in their development and international activity. We know how much we lost due to its absence under communism, and we know how much we gained when we returned to democracy as a means of achieving civic aspirations and an expression of national sovereignty.

It was for that purpose that a broad international initiative of the Community of Democracies was born in Warsaw in 2000. And this is precisely why my country established the international Lech Wałęsa Solidarity Award for activity in support of democracy and fundamental freedoms.

Poland steadfastly believes that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms for all. We will strive to attain the appropriate inclusion of these questions in the new UN Development Agenda.

Solidarity – Responsibility – Involvement is the triad of principles in the UN system that we are faithful to, and which we have learnt through our experiences over the last decades in our history. We fully acknowledge the involvement of the United Nations in the improvement of the social and economic situation in these regions of the world where the conditions are the most difficult. Poland

actively participates in the definition of the priorities and the means of implementation of the new development agenda that will replace the programme of the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, and will purposefully participate in making it a reality.

The new development agenda should fully and coherently integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, while at the same time being focused on the reduction of poverty and protection of the natural environment. Reaching an international understanding on this matter is a task as ambitious as it is difficult, yet necessary and feasible. The output of the previous session of the General Assembly worked out by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, under the highly efficient co-chairmanship of Kenya and Hungary, define the course of further discussion on the matter. Poland will continue its active involvement in a dialogue that should bring about the development of a new, ambitious, and universal post-2015 development agenda.

Mister Chairman,

It is vitally important to stop further climate changes on the Earth caused by the development of human civilisation, and also to adjust to the changes that are already irreversible. Here lurk existential issues of security, the problem of economic development, maintenance of biological diversity in the Earth's ecosystem, and of quality of life. In its capacity as host of the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Warsaw in November 2013, and still holding the Presidency of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Climate Change, Poland remains committed to achieving the successful conclusion of these negotiations, perhaps the most important currently taking place in international relations. We believe that it is possible to achieve this understanding, of key importance for humanity, in a manner that is as gradual as

it is sustainable, and fair towards countries at various levels of economic development. Much like Mr Ban Ki-Moon, the Secretary-General of our Organisation, with whom I have discussed this subject a number of times, I hope that such an understanding will be achieved in the nearest future. I would like to reiterate that despite the hardships and costs of economic transformation, Poland since 1988 has decreased the emission of greenhouse gases by approximately 30%, i.e. it greatly exceeded the reduction obligations stipulated in the Kyoto protocol.

Mister Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

Poland is strongly involved in various fields of activity conducted by our organisation, from human rights to disarmament. That is why we know perfectly well that nothing can replace the continuously improvable UN system. We are currently becoming a state that is taking an increasing measure of responsibility for cooperation in development, humanitarian aid, and climate protection. We are ready to share our experience and our ideas as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2018–2019.

We intend to support such a reform of that body that will increase its representative character with parallel reinforcement of its efficiency. This primarily concerns the consequences of the duties of the Security Council in situations covered by the principle of responsibility for protection, approved by our community in 2005. The idea is to develop a mechanism that will provide the Council with the capacity to act in such a situation, while at the same time making it impossible to abuse the mandate of the Council for purposes other than execution of this responsibility. I have mentioned this from this podium twice already. This should perhaps be combined with a broader reform of the Council, whose directions were outlined before the historic summit in 2005.

Today, much like nearly 70 years ago, we invariably want to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights (...) and of nations, large and small”.

Thank you for your attention.