

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 28 September 2015

[all-English version]

The 70th session of the General Assembly has opened with a towering achievement: the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, including 17 inspiring Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs.

Our aim is clear. Our mission is possible. And our destination is in our sights: an end to extreme poverty by 2030; a life of peace and dignity for all.

What counts now is translating promises on paper into change on the ground.

We owe this and much more to the vulnerable, the oppressed, the displaced and the forgotten people in our world.

We owe this to a world where inequality is growing, trust is fading, and impatience with leadership can be seen and felt far and wide.

We owe this to “succeeding generations”, in the memorable words the Charter.

In this year in which we mark the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, we must heed the call of the Charter, and hear the voices of “we the peoples”. That is how we can overcome the grim realities of the present -- and seize the remarkable opportunities of our era.

The Millennium Development Goals made poverty history for hundreds of millions of people.

Now we are poised to continue the job while reaching higher, broader and deeper.

The new framework does not just add goals. It weaves the goals together, with human rights, the rule of law and women’s empowerment as crucial parts of an integrated whole.

The global goals are universal.

You, the world’s leaders, have committed to leave no one behind -- and to reach those farthest behind, first.

We can build on the momentum this December in Paris with a robust agreement on climate change.

Remarkable changes are under way to reduce harmful greenhouse emissions. I have seen and visited vast solar power installations bringing a new energy future into being. There is wind in the sails of climate action.

Yet it is clear that the national targets submitted by the member states will not be enough. We face a choice: either raise ambition -- or risk raising temperatures above the 2-degree Celsius threshold, which science tells us we must not cross.

Reaching our sustainable development goals means organizing ourselves better. Let there be no more walls or boxes; no more ministries or agencies working at cross-purposes. Let us move from silos to synergy, supported by data, long-term planning and a will to do things differently.

Financing will be a key test.

I welcome the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the renewed pledge by developed countries to invest 0.7 per cent of gross national income in official development assistance. Aid works -- but few countries have met this target. I salute those that have, and urge others to follow their example.

Climate finance will be crucial. I urge developed countries to meet the agreed goal of \$100 billion per year by 2020. We must also get the Green Climate Fund up and running.

The world continues to squander trillions in wasteful military spending. Why is it easier to find the money to destroy people and planet than it is to protect them?

Succeeding generations depend on us to finally get our priorities right.

Suffering today is at heights not seen in a generation. One hundred million people require immediate humanitarian assistance. At least 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes or their countries. The United Nations has asked for nearly \$20 billion to meet this year's needs -- six times the level of a decade ago.

UN humanitarian agencies and our partners are braving difficult conditions to reach people.

Member States have been generous, but demands continue to dwarf funding.

The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 in Istanbul is a critical moment to reaffirm solidarity and explore how to better build resilience and address emergencies.

But the global humanitarian system is not broken; it is broke.

We are not receiving enough money to save enough lives.

We have about half of what we need to help the people of Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen – and just a third for Syria.

Our response plan for Ukraine is just 39 per cent funded.

And the appeal for Gambia, where one in four children suffers from stunting, has been met with silence.

Numbers this low raise suffering to new highs.

People need emergency assistance, but what they want even more is lasting solutions. They may appreciate a tent, but they deserve to go home.

Our aim is not just to keep people alive, but to give them a life -- a decent life.

Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are generously hosting several million Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Countries across the developing world continue to host and receive large numbers of refugees despite their own limited means.

People are on the move as never before, in the Americas and the Sahel, in the Mediterranean and Andaman Seas.

These flows raise complex issues, and rouse strong passions.

Certain touchstones must guide our response: international law, human rights, basic compassion.

All countries need to do more to shoulder their responsibilities.

I commend those in Europe that are upholding the Union's values and providing asylum.

At the same time, I urge Europe to do more. After the Second World War, it was Europeans seeking the world's assistance.

I will convene a high-level meeting on September 30, the day after tomorrow, aimed at promoting a comprehensive approach to the refugee and migration crisis.

We must crack down on traffickers and address the pressures being faced by countries of destination.

We must combat discrimination. In the 21st century, we should not be building fences or walls.

But above all, we must look at root causes in countries of origin.

Syrians are leaving their country and their homes because of oppression, extremism, destruction and fear.

Four years of diplomatic paralysis by the Security Council and others have allowed the crisis to spin out of control.

The responsibility for ending the conflict lies first and foremost with the Syrian warring parties. They are the ones turning their country to ruins.

But it is not enough to look only within Syria for a solution. The battle is also being driven by regional powers and rivalries. Weapons and money flowing into the country are fuelling the fire.

My Special Envoy is doing everything he can to forge the basis for a peaceful settlement.

It is time now for others, primarily the Security Council and key regional actors, to step forward.

Five countries in particular hold the key: the Russian Federation, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. But as long as one side will not compromise with the other, it is futile to expect change on the ground.

Innocent Syrians pay the price of more barrel bombs and terrorism. There must be no impunity for atrocious crimes. Our commitment to justice should lead us to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court.

In Yemen, 21 million people -- 80 per cent of the population -- need humanitarian assistance.

All sides are showing disregard for human life -- but most of the casualties are being caused by air-strikes. I call for an end to the bombings, which are also destroying Yemeni cities, infrastructure and heritage.

Here, too, the proxy battles of others are driving the fighting. I once again urge the parties to return to the table, negotiate in good faith and resolve this crisis through dialogue facilitated by my Special Envoy. Let me be clear: There is no military solution to this conflict.

We must also guard against the dangerous drift in the Middle East Peace Process. With settlements expanding and incitement and provocations on the rise, it is essential for

Israelis and Palestinians to re-engage – and for the international community to pressure the parties to do so. The world can no longer wait for leaders to finally choose a path to peace.

Da'esh, Boko Haram and Al-Shabab remain major threats, especially to the women and girls who have been systematically targeted. The world must unite against the blatant brutality of these groups. We must also counter the exclusion and hopelessness on which extremists feed. Moreover, States must never violate human rights in the fight against terror; such abuses only perpetuate the cycle.

Early next year, I will present to the General Assembly a comprehensive plan of action on how to counter violent extremism and terrorism.

I commend the landmark nuclear agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 countries. Dialogue and patient diplomacy have paid dividends. I hope this spirit of solidarity among the Permanent Members of the Security Council can be demonstrated in other conflict areas, such as Syria, Yemen and Ukraine.

Let us build on the recent agreements in South Sudan, finalize the agreement in Libya, and spare those countries further suffering.

Now is the time for renewed dialogue to address continuing tension on the Korean peninsula. I call on the parties to refrain from taking any action that may increase mistrust, and urge them to instead promote reconciliation and efforts towards a peaceful, de-nuclearized peninsula. I am ready to support inter-Korean cooperation. We also need to step up our work for the well-being of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

I am deeply troubled by growing restrictions on media freedoms and civil society across the world. It is not a crime for journalists, human rights defenders and others to exercise their basic rights. We must preserve the space for civil society and the press to do their vital work without fear of attack and imprisonment.

Democratic backsliding is a threat in too many places, as leaders seek to stay in office beyond their mandated limits. We see rallies and petitions being engineered to look like the spontaneous will of the people. Those manufactured groundswells of support only lay the groundwork for instability. I urge leaders to abide by the constitutional limits on their terms.

Collectively, these crises have stretched to the limits our vital tools for conflict resolution and humanitarian response.

Earlier this month, I put forward my vision for strengthening UN peace operations, building on the recommendations of an independent panel.

Our peacekeeping and political missions need enhanced capabilities and clear objectives.

We need a renewed commitment to prevention, stronger regional partnerships, and sustained engagement on peacebuilding.

And we must unlock the potential of women to advance peace, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1325.

I hope the General Assembly will take early action as a signal of its commitment to this effort.

People today, and succeeding generations, need us to make the most of this rare opportunity for comprehensive progress.

Founded in a fractured world, the United Nations brought hope that collective action could avoid another global catastrophe.

Over the past 70 years, we have helped to liberate millions of people from colonialism and supported the successful struggle against apartheid. We have defeated deadly diseases, defended human rights and deepened the rule of law.

This and more we have done – but that is far from enough.

We are living through a time of severe test -- but also one of great opportunity.

Today, we are more connected than ever, better informed than ever, and have better tools than ever. The recipes for positive change are on the table; the ingredients for success are in our hands.

We continue to reform the United Nations -- although we know we must do much more, both managerially and politically.

We can draw strength from the empowerment of women -- but we still need to step it up for gender equality on the way to Planet 50/50.

I am inspired by the world's young people, who make up half the world's population -- and whose voices we must integrate more fully in decision-making everywhere.

And I am impressed with the way we, all of us, can unite behind vital causes -- like the 2030 Development Agenda.

One year ago, when we gathered for the general debate, the Ebola crisis in West Africa was claiming lives daily. Families were being devastated. Fear was rife. Forecasts suggested frightening losses in the months ahead.

Today, thanks to collective action by communities and their governments and others all around the world, cases of Ebola have declined dramatically. The outbreak is not over, and we must remain vigilant. But the response is working, with lessons pointing to a safer future for all.

When we stand together, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

Three days ago, young people from many nations stood together in the balcony of this Hall. They asked for one thing above all: change.

There is nothing we can say to the world's children that can convince them the world needs to be the way it is.

That means we must do everything we can to close the gap between the world as it is, and the world as it should be. That is the mission of the United Nations.

Let's work together to make this world better for all, where everybody can live with dignity and prosperity.

I thank you for your leadership.