

Address by President Hollande to the UN General Assembly [fr]

70th session of the UN General Assembly - General debate - Address by Mr François Hollande, President of the French Republic - 28 September 2015

Mr President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Our organization, the UN, is celebrating its 70th anniversary. Immense progress has been made since it was founded as an institution charged with keeping the peace. It has succeeded in doing so on numerous occasions. And yet, 70 years on, we still have drama, tragedy, conflict and war. And the world is obliged once again to face up to great challenges. What are those challenges today? Hundreds of thousands – millions even – of refugees in the Middle East, in Africa, in the hope of obtaining protection or quite simply of saving their lives. Terrorism is hitting civilian populations and no country is spared by this scourge.

And then there are conflicts that have gone unresolved for years and years despite the fact that we know they could degenerate at any time – I have the Middle East in mind here. And then at the same time there are disasters, tsunamis, earthquakes, islands soon to vanish, coasts going under water and glaciers melting: climate change.

Faced with these challenges, we must all shoulder our responsibilities at our own levels. France, in many domains, never refuses to participate. But France wished to host the Climate Conference, no doubt because it was aware that a terrible failure occurred in Copenhagen and that it was necessary to take the right decision this time, a decision that can only be taken by the international community as a whole.

So in Paris we will need to ask ourselves just one question: is mankind – are we – capable of taking the decision to preserve life on the planet? Yes, that question alone places us in a position of a gravity we could never have imagined for our generation. You may say “but we can do it later, perhaps at another conference!” I can assure you of one thing, and I will be blunt: if it is not done in Paris, it will be too late for the world.

For several months, things have been making good progress and very strong statements have been forthcoming precisely from the countries most responsible for global warming – I am thinking notably here of the two major emitters, the United States and China, that have made commitments that help change the state of play. There have also been many calls from all continents stressing the gravity and urgency, with detailed testimony on what global warming is already, now, today.

There are also countries that have hitherto been reluctant – here I have the developing world in mind – and who have been asking themselves whether it is in fact useful to impose constraints upon themselves when the most developed countries have themselves refused to be bound by such rules and obligations. Today, if you ask me for my own prediction – and I am often asked – I will say that an agreement in Paris is far from certain but that all is still possible.

I see three conditions to be met for us to be able to say that the Paris Conference has been a genuine success, worthy of the task you have entrusted to us in asking us to host it. The first is to be able to conclude a universal agreement, generally applicable to all, an agreement that is binding and differentiated in order to ensure that all contribute their fair share and no more. To date, ninety States – half therefore of those that sit at the United Nations – have submitted their national contributions, and this represents – the figure is already substantial – 80% of all greenhouse gas emissions. That means that half the world has not yet responded and I invite you therefore to do so and to do so rapidly to ensure that we can assess as of now what, given the contributions from all States, we can assure the world will be the limit on global warming.

The second condition that will determine our success or failure is that we must be able to ensure that our resolution, our action is long-lasting. The Paris agreement must not be a destination, a conclusion, but rather a starting point, the beginning of a process. We shall be able to be assured of that with a revision mechanism to be included in the agreement that will make it possible to evaluate regularly, to measure periodically and even to revise every five years our national contributions. That is what will allow us to be sure that at the end of the century, that is to say well beyond our own lives, the planet will not have warmed by more than two degrees.

The third condition that will signify failure or success, is that the developed countries will need to make financial commitments. I am well aware that the figure was announced already in Copenhagen: \$100 billion to finance energy transition, adaptation and technology transfer. We need to raise \$100 billion in 2020, but it must be said now to ensure that emerging countries, developing countries can be sure that they will be helped, supported, assisted and that this leap forward, this sharing of technology, will actually come about.

One hundred billion. The OECD now has the task of providing an initial estimate. This will be presented at the Lima meeting – I thank the President of Peru for taking forward the programme begun at COP20. Yes, the OECD will make an initial estimate – we are not yet at \$100 billion. So it will be necessary between now and Paris, in two months, to continue to mobilize the World Bank, the major development banks, the financial institutions, States and private actors if we are to arrive at \$100 billion. Everybody must set an example and France is no exception to the rule that when you are the host country, you must do better than your guests, or at least as well. I can announce here that our annual funding, France’s annual funding for the climate, which stands today at €3 billion, will exceed €5 billion by 2020. And the increase in aid will not involve loans alone, but also grants because it is with grants – that is to say funds transferred directly and not repaid – that we will be able to provide powerful aid to developing countries to adapt to the effects of climate change.

If we are in a position to meet these three requirements: a universal agreement that can be revised and which will be revised every five years, with funding that can be at the level of all that we need to cover in terms of new needs and to bring to bear in terms of future technology, then yes, in that case we will be able to say that in Paris, in two months, we stepped up to the mark. Not simply up to the mark of History but to that of the future.

It is a good thing that the international community is able to look to the future and say what kind of world it desires – we did so with the Sustainable Development Goals – and we must do so for the climate. But what is expected from the United Nations is not only – and it is already a great deal – to ensure that the world is fit to live in at the end of the century, it is also that it should be bearable today at a time when conflicts and wars confound us with tragedies nobody imagined we would ever see again in 1945 when the United Nations Organization was founded.

Today it is Syria that is calling for us to mobilize, to intervene once again. Many before me have come to this podium to speak on this subject. All consider it to be a tragedy that has struck the Syrian people. All say that a solution must be found. So let us look for that solution together. But first let us take the measure of what has not been done.

Three years ago I stood on this same podium to address you. The Syrian tragedy already counted 30,000 victims; today there are 250,000; 12,000 children are dead, victims of the regime of Bashar al-Assad because the dramatic events in Syria began with a revolution that set out to undermine a dictatorship, the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. At that time there were no terrorists, there were no fundamentalist groups, there was a dictatorship that massacred its own people. And the refugees, those we talk about today, those who are in the camps, the displaced persons, number eight million. That mass of women and men, of children, is not fleeing the war alone, it has been fleeing the regime of Bashar al-Assad for over three years and still today that same regime is raining bombs on innocent civilian populations.

But it is not because there is a terrorist group that itself massacres, kills, rapes and even destroys Humanity's essential heritage that there should be a form of pardon, of amnesty for the regime that created the situation, as if the fact that there exists a terrorist group perpetrating the worst possible acts of evil could provide a way to being part of what is good. No. They are all, those women, those men, those children, victims of the tragedy produced by an alliance of terrorism and dictatorship. No solution can be found other than through a political process.

France, due to its history and also to its ties with this region of the world, intends to shoulder its responsibilities. It has done so once again recently, including the taking of military action, the projection of force. France wishes to work with all and excludes no country, the neighbouring countries that are most concerned, the countries of the Gulf, as well as Iran, the countries of the permanent members of the Security Council, in addition to the Europeans. Our desire is to work with all those who are willing.

I am told there is to be a coalition. This broad coalition, it is possible, it is even desirable, it is necessary to put an end to what is happening in Syria. But such a coalition must have a clear basis or it will never see the light of day. That basis was laid down in Geneva more than three years ago now. And what does the Geneva agreement say? A government of transition with full powers, including, based on mutual consent, members of the present government and the opposition. That is the basis! Let us use it to move forward. Faced with this catastrophe, I see that some are devoting their diplomatic efforts to ensuring the inclusion of Bashar al-Assad in the process. But it is not possible to get the victims to work with the executioner: Assad is the source of the problem; he cannot be part of the solution.

We must therefore put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people but we must also, looking beyond the political transition that must be sought, the broad coalition that must be formed, the condition that must be laid down – a new government capable of uniting those who have fought but without the dictator – we must also give a thought to all the refugees. Until now, they have been in neighbouring countries but here also the international community closed its eyes: it was a long way away. Today, those refugees can bear it no longer; they are beginning a long march. I recalled yesterday before this Assembly that 80% of the world's refugees – refugees because of war, because of conflict, because of the climate, because of poverty – are in the South. Solidarity with the South is coming from the South. It is often the most deprived who welcome the poorest as guests. So there comes a time when refugees start to walk and they cannot be stopped.

If we wish to avoid what we have, alas, seen: tragedy, crossings at the risk of passengers' lives, if we want to avoid a situation in which people-smugglers and criminals exploit despair to enrich still further the coffers of terrorism, in that case, we must take action.

Europe has taken in refugees not only from Syria but also from Iraq, Eritrea and Sudan. That was its duty because Europe is founded on values and principles. The right of asylum is part of that common core that unites all European countries and must continue to unite them. Otherwise it will not be the Europe we set out to build.

But while Europe must do its duty, the rest of the world must also help the refugees. What have we learned in recent days and weeks? That the High Commission for Refugees no longer has the resources, due to lack of funding, to provide the necessary support and assistance to the populations concerned. What have we learned? That the World Food Programme no longer has the resources, here again, to ensure the provision of all refugees' vital needs and food. What have we learned? That in some neighbouring countries, refugees are unable to work.

This is where the cycle that we might have imagined was set in train. If we wish to reverse, may I say, these flows, if we wish to keep refugees as near as possible to their countries of origin then we need to give more resources to the HCR, we need to help neighbouring countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, as well as African countries. We need to assist transit countries, to aid countries that avoid migration. This is a grand plan that we must envisage on this occasion because tragedy is calling upon us to do so, to enable us to take action and avoid further tragedy.

France is doing what it can and will do what it must. Where the World Food Programme is concerned, France has decided to make an immediate increase of €100 million in its support for the United Nations agencies in Syria's neighbouring countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wished to end my remarks by saying to you that the legitimacy of an organization like the United Nations is founded on credibility. If the UN does not have the ability to resolve conflicts that have lasted all too long, if the UN does not have the ability to bring calm to the situations of civilian populations, then we shall be condemned by our powerlessness. Which leads me to think that if we want our Organization, now celebrating its 70th anniversary, to have a future worthy of what its founders envisaged, then we have no option but to reform the United Nations.

France advocates a broadening of the membership of the Security Council. France advocates a change in representation on the Security Council. France advocates that continents should clearly bear responsibility for the world in the context of the Security Council. France wishes the permanent members of the Security Council to be unable in the future to use their right of veto in cases of mass atrocities. How can we accept that the UN, still today, can be paralyzed when the worst possible events occur? Here again, let us set an example. I give an undertaking here that France will never use its power of veto where there have been mass atrocities.

The right of veto as it was introduced at the founding of the United Nations was not a right to block action. It was a duty to act. We must act. We can act. We have shown that we can for 70 years. Here today we must act to resolve the tragedies of today and to save the planet tomorrow. Let us act.

