



**Address by the President of the Republic of Croatia
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**at the
United Nations General Assembly 2016
“The Sustainable Development Goals:
A Universal Push to Transform Our World”**

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Mr. President,

„Želimo budućnost u kojoj svi rade, sretno žive i vole se.“

These words translate into “We want a future in which everyone works, lives a happy life and loves one another”. They were recently written in the Book of Ideas by a six-year-old boy whose name is Lovro, when he visited my Office with a number of other children, to mark the beginning of the new school year in Croatia. But they could easily have been written by any child in this world.

It is a simple, yet a powerful wish. In order to transform our world, we as leaders must listen to Lovro’s words. And for this reason I want his voice to be heard today in the United Nations General Assembly. No one can argue that these three simple truths, among which a right to a happy life and the freedom of choice as universal drivers of a better world, are not indeed the ultimate objective of the Agenda 2030.

A year has passed since we have adopted the milestone Agenda 2030 and we are now one step and one year closer to its deadline. Today, in terms of achievements and responsibilities, I would like to address sustainable development by focusing on human potential, natural resources and resilient societies.

We have all signed the Agenda, this plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. People should be at the heart of our efforts, and youth at the very core. Our goal as leaders is to empower our youth through education and to give them opportunities to be the catalysts of transformation and progress. Now is the time to start viewing our youth as the guardians of the Agenda 2030, because in fourteen years whatever progress we have achieved, will be theirs to carry on.

I would agree with many who argue that even today, in 2016, we must decide whether we opt for open or closed societies. Whatever we do to safeguard the future should be done with determination, with clear choices in mind. There is much work to be done. We must begin by restoring public confidence in governments and international organizations. We must embrace

our common values with strength, courage and true conviction - beginning with tolerance - and become active and dedicated builders of a world where there is no room for despair.

True inclusivity means more than just being open for cooperation and raising awareness only on occasion. It should be a continuous search for consensus, nationally and internationally, and an active involvement of all stakeholders in building new strategic alliances. There is an evident need for ending the much too prevailing silo approach if we are to achieve synergies when implementing mutually interdependent goals. Security, prosperity and human rights go hand in hand and cannot be separated.

Ladies and gentlemen,

According to the latest UNICEF statistics, over 50 million children are currently “uprooted” and almost 60 million children do not have access to primary education. These children are counting on us to give them the chance they deserve. We should not act only when moved by images of the Syrian boys Aylan or Omran, true symbols of our world gone horribly wrong.

The optimism and resilience shown by children and, most of all, their unbridled honesty are qualities that I respect and admire. All children should have the right to their childhood and education. It is devastating to know how many children did not begin class this autumn because they are victims of the various global crises that we allow to persist.

In terms of unlocking global human potential, I believe that if we want to give future generations a chance at a better life by 2030, we must address three main mutually reinforcing phenomena: large scale migrations, demographic dynamics and youth unemployment.

We need a predictable, humane, responsible and legally sound system of governing international migration. Here, Croatia commends the New York Declaration that we adopted on Monday, as well as the Agenda for Humanity adopted in Istanbul. Implementing them together with the Agenda 2030 will address the root causes of large movements of people. On this issue we need not minimize anyone’s dignity or rights, nor underestimate the perils that surround them.

Our immediate focus should be two-fold. We must provide assistance to both countries of origin and receiving countries in order to promote safe, regular and orderly migration management. We must promote global efforts in countering organized crime networks in human trafficking. This is a global crisis of human mobility and as such requires a global response.

We must end the policy of double standards and the hypocritical approach to the tragedy that is unfolding as we speak. We must help those who managed to leave the fields of destruction, but we must also do our utmost to assist those who have stayed behind and are left with no means and strength to escape.

All societies, developed and underdeveloped alike, are currently facing not only one generation, but generations of youth that are unemployed, disappointed and discouraged, while others are running from conflict, violence and intolerance. They are extremely sceptical about their future and make easy prey for all kinds of manipulation and radicalisation.

Social media and modern communication technology are becoming a double-edged sword. They provide us with unparalleled opportunities, making the world interconnected in ways that only yesterday few dared to dream of. At the same time, they carry the dark potential to spread hatred and intolerance, to build invisible walls around those who look or think different. We must pay special attention to this possibility and find prudence to use new technologies to improve not only our daily lives, but also our hearts and minds.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Education, knowledge, and tolerance are more than just the tools of choice when dealing with political and social discrimination, exclusion and preventing violent extremism and terrorism. They are the way forward. They are the key to success and fundamental drivers of sustainable development.

Constant investment in education systems always pays back with big dividends. More and more countries are recognizing the necessity of a comprehensive education reform, because too many current education systems are generating youth that cannot find employment.

Education has the power to multiply opportunities. It is an engine that creates choices, providing every individual with the freedom to choose a path of his or her own.

Gender inequality is the most pervasive form of global inequality and a pressing human rights concern. Women and girls are still exposed to a range of obstacles to their complete and full inclusion in social, economic and political life.

There will be no real progress without a gender-responsive implementation of the Agenda 2030. To succeed we need more women in politics and business, in diplomacy and on executive boards. But this will not happen without men. Their role in the empowerment of women, their support and understanding, is as crucial as the will of women to succeed.

This year, Croatia is chairing the *Equal Futures Partnership* - an innovative multilateral initiative with a view to encourage Member States to empower women economically and politically. The high level meeting of its members and supporters will take place tomorrow. I invite all of you to find time to pay due attention to this endeavour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nature is just as irreplaceable as people. Development strategies must seriously take into account our natural resources as the fundamental starting point. Climate change is a powerful weapon of mass destruction and is getting out of control. We have very little time to reverse this self-destructive course. Climate change is also a risk multiplier of other security challenges, including large scale migrations and regional instabilities born out of hopelessness and desolation. We must ensure climate action and make sure that the Paris Agreement enters into force as soon as possible.

As a country on the northern shores of the Mediterranean, Croatia is following the developments across this cradle of our civilization with care and deep concern. The Southern Mediterranean has sadly become a sea of dangerous journeys, where legendary tales of the classical world are replaced by new stories of human suffering, where ancient monuments are being destroyed to dust, and where indifference to human life sometimes reaches an unimaginable scale. The stability, security and wellbeing of the Mediterranean remain a priority of Croatian foreign policy.

Our societies are exposed to a complex global security environment with increased mutual dependency. There is a whole range of hybrid threats to national and international security: violent extremism, terrorism, foreign terrorist fighters, uncontrolled migration, organized crime, risks related to the cyber environment and malicious use of new technologies. Large scale migrations and unemployment are interconnected, just as failed states and fragile governments are related to conflict.

Terrorism continues to represent not only a security concern, but also a detrimental economic factor for every country, causing millions of people to leave their homes in search of safety and prosperity. We need to strengthen the resilience of our societies at the grass-root level, particularly the fabric of multicultural and multi-confessional societies, against terrorist propaganda, attempts at violent radicalization and other exploits at extremism. In addition to our efforts on sustainable and long-term deradicalization and fighting terrorist narratives, especially those in cyberspace, we need to address underlying socioeconomic drivers of terrorism, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, lack of education and lack of economic prosperity.

When countering global threats that impede the emergence and growth of resilient societies, the issue of disarmament must remain at the forefront. Recently we have achieved success in the development and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. At the same time, large parts of the UN disarmament machinery are stalled. The NPT 2015 review conference of state parties remains a case in point.

In our quest for a more secure global community, we must spare no effort in the field of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Twenty years have passed since the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was opened for signature, but we still must invigorate our determination to become a nuclear-test-free world.

New technologies and the fourth industrial revolution are changing our lives for the better in more ways than one. However, they also have a negative impact on security and disarmament. Technology like 3D printing is changing the algorithm in the field of conventional weapons and the misuse of cyberspace might have unforeseen consequences in chemical, biological,

radiological and nuclear fields. Therefore, we must broaden our reach when it comes to disarmament topics and align it with new realities.

Croatia considers participation in international missions and operations as a principal duty that will contribute to peace. In this regard, we are preparing to place an Engineering Company for Horizontal Construction at the disposal of UN Peacekeeping Operations.

Mr. President,

Today, on the International Day of Peace, it is necessary to emphasize that women are powerful agents of peace and security. We must not treat women only as victims of conflict and violence. Women are powerful agents of change. Their increased contribution to preventing and resolving conflict, as well as to maintaining sustainable and inclusive peace, should be encouraged. More female peacekeepers could help us combat sexual violence, promote gender awareness among the host nations' populations, and improve relationships with local citizens.

To contribute to this goal, Croatia is conducting a UN training course for women police officers from Asia, Africa and Europe. This course is organised back-to-back with pre-deployment military training in order to enhance the synergy between the military and civilian sectors, by simultaneously integrating gender and multicultural aspects of peacekeeping.

We commend the Secretary-General for advancing the responsibility to protect. In the last ten years, a lot has been accomplished in building consensus around the concept and strengthening the will and capacity for its implementation.

Croatia advocates the further strengthening of the role of the International Criminal Court to take strong responsibility in prosecuting mass atrocities and war crimes, including those against cultural heritage committed by state or non-state actors. We believe that it is of paramount importance to put an end to the culture of impunity. And this must be done without any politicizing, without putting daily politics above the rule of law, and certainly without rewriting or misinterpreting history.

It is a hard-earned wisdom that there can be no true justice without peace, or peace without justice. Establishing individual accountability through strong evidence and legal norms is essential. International tribunals and judicial mechanisms can lay the foundations to make voices of victims heard and historical volumes of evidence recorded, but it is up to each society to bring the process of reconciliation to its end.

Respect and protection of human rights is a prerequisite for sustainable peace and development. In this domain, our work should never stop. We strongly support and advocate the Human Rights Up Front initiative. By our candidacy for the Human Rights Council (2017-2019), Croatia looks forward to constructively contributing to its more effective work in the promotion, protection, and further development of human rights.

Croatia will continue to be actively engaged in the UN reform process. We commend recent advancements in the process of election of the Secretary-General and strengthening the Office of the President of the General Assembly. However, we are still lagging behind in terms of what is expected concerning the Security Council reform, as accentuated by the number of ongoing, prolonged and nascent crises in the world.

We have great expectations from the next Secretary-General. We hope that she or he will give a bold impetus to the processes of carrying forward our Organization, making it even more effective, accountable, transparent and, above all, more relevant.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world has been yearning for inspirational and effective leadership. The solidarity of our global society is deteriorating as problems pile up and hope diminishes. Will we accept that we are creating a world led by feelings of separation, fear and cynicism because we have allowed violence, injustice and crises to prevail? Or will we reverse these trends and choose to achieve a better tomorrow?

Fourteen years from now, our children will not ask us what we planned together or what we signed up to do. Instead, they will ask us what we have achieved together and if we have made a difference. And so, we as leaders need to inspire our citizens again and act together today.

I want to end with a message to all children in Croatia, to all children in the world: your voices provide guidance and are an obligation for all of us who gather here at this permanent meeting point of mankind. Lovro, your voice resonates today in the General Assembly Hall and you are making a difference.

Thank you.

Message from Lovro

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