



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA



STATEMENT

BY H.E. MR. ROSEN PLEVNELIEV,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

AT THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE 71ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK, 22 SEPTEMBER 2016

**Mr. President,
Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

We congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson (Питър Томсон) on assuming the Presidency of the Seventy-First Session and extend our gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft (Моенс Люкетoft) for his commitment and best efforts in promoting transparency and efficiency within the UN system.

The theme of this year's General Debate "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world" is extremely important for all of us. The full and timely implementation of the SDGs is crucial to ensure progress and prosperity around the world, strengthen peace and make our planet a better place to live.

But peace and freedom are tested today. We are witnessing the worst security situation since the end of the Second World War. National borders and international principles are challenged. In many regions war and terror prevail. States and institutions disintegrate. The world is out of balance today. We see unstable regions, unsafe borders and worried citizens. Terrorism is on the rise. No one is immune and no one is safe. War zones have become breeding grounds for radical ideologies and launch pads for terrorist activities. Violations and abuses of human rights occur every day and innocent women and children are the most affected.

In these turbulent times the number of crises around the world is at a record high. Protracted conflicts are causing so many humanitarian tragedies. Conflict resolution and reconciliation become more challenging to achieve and sustain. It is very easy to occupy and destroy but it is very difficult to rebuild and reconcile broken societies.

Europe is a symbol of hope for millions of refugees. Inspired by our common values we are determined to further strengthen our efforts to manage migration in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Countries that are closer to the conflict zones like Bulgaria are facing an unprecedented challenge. We welcome the New York Declaration as a symbol of our joint effort to strengthen international cooperation to better protect and assist refugees. Migration should be managed through collective global efforts in a responsible way. Our specific focus should be on the protection of the human rights of migrants and refugees, especially the most vulnerable – women, children and persons with disabilities. At the same time, all migrants have the duty to comply with the laws of the country of residence. Bulgaria welcomes the emphasis on the global responsibility-sharing. This crucial element should guide us in building partnerships between the countries of origin, transit and destination and the entire international community.

The current global humanitarian crisis reminds us that we must tackle global issues in an inclusive and integrated manner, focusing on the root causes.

It is a children's crisis. We must hear their voice. We must recall that a child is first a child and after that a refugee. The child is entitled to the full set of rights as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including family reunification.

Mr. President,

The United Nations has a crucial role to play in addressing these challenges. Our crisis management efforts require a holistic UN response, preventive diplomacy, mediation, peace-building, resilience and reconciliation. Bulgaria participates actively in the work of the Group of Friends of Mediation, which contributes to these efforts. We are committed to help crisis-stricken countries recover. There is an old saying: "Prevention is better than cure."

Bulgaria is committed to the global efforts aimed at preventing and resolving ongoing conflicts. During our very successful Chairmanship-in-Office of the South East European Cooperation Process, Bulgaria proposed concrete initiatives focused on enhancing security, stability, connectivity, reconciliation and sustainable development on the Balkans. Bulgaria plays an important role to strengthen EU's expertise in the region and supports the Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries in the Western Balkans.

The EU has unique significance and strong political legitimacy because of the peaceful discussions and settlement of differences by consensus, because of the shared fundamental rights and rules, and because of the achieved unprecedented in the world level of integration and cooperation among all Member States. Last week Bulgaria hosted very successfully the annual meeting of the Arraiolos Group. Ten Presidents of EU Member States exchanged ideas and shared a vision how to rebuild trust in the European Union and bring lasting stability and prosperity to the Balkans. This is a great recognition of the friendly, balanced and principled foreign policy of Bulgaria.

We need to team up and develop common strategies, rather than build fortresses to defend short-sighted national interests. We have to engage leaders from all sectors of society and not just register, but resolve conflicts. We need prevention - to be pro-active, early detect and solve the crises. We need to empower diplomacy and give way to principles, not interests and weapons. To reconfirm and not renegotiate the principles of international order. As the Vice-President of the European Commission Mrs. Kristalina Georgieva stressed during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, we need a step-change in the way we address humanitarian crises by looking more rigorously into the root causes. The Summit reaffirmed the shared commitment and responsibility of the international community to the universality of humanitarian principles and law.

Bringing back peace and reconciliation to Syria can only be achieved through a Syrian-led political process which involves an inclusive transition that takes into account the aspirations of all parts of society. This process should be based on the principles of the Geneva Communiqué and all relevant Security Council Resolutions. It is important to create favourable conditions to resume the intra-Syrian peace talks as soon as possible.

We do not want to go back to the time when great powers allocated their spheres of influence. We cannot once again allow “political interests” to divide and occupy the territory of sovereign states or create frozen conflicts. The recent escalation of the conflict in Ukraine is a source of deep concern. Any attempt to destabilize Ukraine is unacceptable. Bulgaria strongly supports the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. My country renews its call for the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements and reiterates its consistent policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea in line with the UN General Assembly Resolution and the relevant decisions of the Council of the European Union.

Bulgaria supports the process of building a peaceful, stable and self-reliant Afghanistan. We will continue to contribute to the reconstruction and state-building process in Afghanistan through our participation in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. We are contributing to the Afghanistan National Army Trust Fund and we are assisting in building Afghanistan administrative capacity through our Official Development Assistance.

The Middle East Peace Process has reached a critical stage. New initiatives are needed for reviving the two-state solution. Bulgaria welcomes the recent efforts in that direction, especially the Quartet Report. We highly value and fully support the work of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Mr. Nickolay Mladenov in his challenging mission. We reaffirm our position that the “two-state solution” formula is the realistic, just and lasting way to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A solution that could satisfy

the aspirations of both sides can be achieved only through direct negotiations, with no conditions attached, and in conformity with all relevant international obligations.

Bulgaria supports the implementation of the agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian Nuclear Programme which is an important step forward in achieving stability in the region. We hope that all agreed measures will be fully implemented.

DPRK's fifth consecutive nuclear test carried out in September is a direct violation of the UN Security Council Resolutions. We urge the DPRK to suspend its nuclear and ballistic missile programs and to resume dialogue with the international community, including in the framework of the Six-Party talks.

Terrorism and violent extremism are an alarming threat to peace and security. It is a source of grave concern that such acts have increased dramatically. We cannot and should not accept that this is "the new normal". Every effort should be made to eradicate terrorism and violent extremism. Bulgaria is a proud member of the international Anti-Terrorism Coalition.

The UN has an important role to play in managing and coordinating comprehensive counter terrorism actions across the world. The relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy are a good basis for international cooperation in this field. Bulgaria supports the Secretary-General's review of the UN Counter Terrorism architecture.

Prevention of radicalization is an essential part of the response. Bulgaria has adopted the required domestic legislation and has built the necessary institutional capacity. Education, protection of cultural heritage and upholding human rights will help us deal with the reasons forcing individuals to join violent extremist groups.

The role of UNESCO in those efforts is crucial. We commend the dedicated work and invaluable contribution of Mrs. Irina Bokova and her leadership in promoting education and intercultural dialogue globally. Her outstanding performance and strong commitment to

the principles and purposes of the UN are fundamental for achieving sustainable progress and long-lasting results.

Mr. President,

We made history with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Now it is time for their implementation. It is up to all of us to adapt our national strategies and deliver on these commitments.

As President of Bulgaria I was proud to be among the first to sign the historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change during the High-level Ceremony here in New York. My country supports the early entry into force of the Paris Agreement. I have the pleasure to announce that the Bulgarian Government has already initiated its domestic ratification procedure.

My country is elaborating the National Programme for Development Bulgaria 2030 by actively engaging civil society, young people, the private sector and media. We focus on education, high-tech and innovation to build green and energy efficient economy. To that end we educate young Bulgarians on the importance of sustainability. Since 2015 many Bulgarian schools in partnership with UNICEF have introduced special programmes to teach children about the SDGs.

Mr. President,

Peace is not a given and it is up to all of us to protect it. And peace is not just the absence of war. Peace is human rights. Peace is rule of law. Promoting human rights is a core purpose of the UN and defines its identity as an organization. Bulgaria has been strongly advocating for strengthening the human rights pillar of the UN and for mainstreaming human rights in all the work of the organization.

Bulgaria is determined to further contribute to promoting human rights internationally as member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2019 – 2021 and would rely on partners' valuable support for its candidacy.

Bulgaria attaches great importance to the protection of children and the promotion of their rights. All Government policies and programmes related to children follow a human rights-based approach, taking into consideration the best interests of the child principle. As co-chair of the Group of Friends of Children and SDGs, Bulgaria has been strongly advocating for the integration of children's human rights in all major intergovernmental processes at the UN. It is our firm conviction that children should be at the heart of global action.

We made children's rights a strategic priority of the Council of Europe during our Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and we are proud with the adoption of the Sofia Strategy for the Rights of the Child and the full support of all 47 Member States.

I commend the excellent work of the previous Bulgarian Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Stefan Tafrov, for his successful Chairmanship of the Third Committee of the 68th Session of the General Assembly and his Vice-Presidency of the UNICEF Executive Board, and for his dedication to the cause of children and human rights.

In the last few decades the UN has made significant progress in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. These efforts should continue and be further strengthened. Bulgaria is actively engaged at all levels in promoting gender equality, as well as in ending gender-based discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girls. My country strongly supports UN-Women's "Planet 50-50" campaign for achieving gender equality by 2030.

Women in Bulgaria enjoy full participation in all areas of life. In our Government 2 out of 3 Deputy Prime Ministers and 9 out of 18 Ministers are women. Two thirds of the magistrates at all levels are women. Bulgaria ranks third in the EU in terms of women's participation in the executive boards of large companies.

Mr. President,

It is widely recognized that the UN must change and adapt to the new realities. We need an Organization that is properly equipped to meet new challenges and is responsive to ever-growing needs. Strengthening transparency, coherence and cost-efficiency of the UN system is of paramount importance.

In recent years, there has been growing support of the international community for ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in gaining access to senior decision-making positions, including the post of the UN Secretary-General. The relevant Resolution of the General Assembly stresses the need to ensure equal and fair distribution based on gender and geographical balance while meeting the highest possible requirements, on the appointment of the Secretary-General.

After eight male Secretaries-General the time has come for a capable and respectable woman from Eastern Europe to lead the United Nations. Bulgaria has a very strong candidate, a true leader with extensive experience in international relations and excellent management skills. A candidate who deserves your trust and support.

Thank you, Mr. President!