

President, Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me express my deepest condolences and sympathy to the victims of the natural disasters that have occurred in recent days in North America -- hurricanes that have devastated Caribbean island nations and parts of the United States -- and earthquakes that have hit Mexico. We convey our solidarity to the governments of these nations during these difficult times. No country, including Georgia, is immune from natural disasters. Solidarity is what strengthens nations addressing these severe challenges.

Excellences,

My fellow countrymen share with me the honor of addressing you today, because the message that I am entrusted to deliver is one they understand in their

bones, having personally experienced it, lived it, and embraced it.

That message—their message—is straightforward: By putting the Georgian citizens at the center of our strategy, we aim to strengthen further democratic institutions, ensure peace and accelerate economic growth. These are the essential multipliers for sustainable development, which connects us with the region and the world.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Georgia's membership in the United Nations. Over this period, we managed to transform our country from a UN humanitarian aid recipient to a top reformer that recently was elected as the Chair of the Open Government Partnership.

Georgia brings to this task the same vision we embrace

for ourselves: putting our citizens at the center.

Georgia's chairmanship of the Open Government Partnership will support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 16: To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

While implementing the SDGs through translating them into the national policies, we see the need of institutional reform of the UN and support the new vision of the Secretary-General Guterres reflected in the declaration we subscribed recently.

When I addressed you last year, Georgia was in the lead-up to a general election. This resulted in our people entrusting us with increased support to lead the country.

The people saw two things. First, that we are committed to making democratic rights and security the key drivers of all our policies. Second, they saw that we offer a clear path for further reforms.

Our citizens feel what international institutions state clearly. Georgia has advanced in all international rankings in the past five years.

We have come to grips with corruption. The Heritage Foundation ranks Georgia 31st in 2017 in terms of freedom from corruption, an improvement of 38 positions from 2012. (Transparency International reflected this progress in 2016, placing Georgia 44th among 176 countries.)

We have prioritized the protection of property rights. The World Economic Forum's 2016-2017 Global

Competitiveness Report elevated Georgia by 77 positions since 2012 and now we are ranked as 43rd among the world's 138 economies.

We are committed to an independent judiciary. The World Economic Forum ranks Georgia at 63rd in this regard, up by 28 positions from 91st.

And in the critical area of law enforcement and physical security, the World Bank ranks Georgia 26th with respect to the fight against organized crime, up from 67th position by 41 steps.

We are not making cosmetic changes. We promised our people that we would introduce a parliamentary system and improve our constitution to conform to the best European standards. In addition to addressing numerous contradictions in the current constitution, the new draft introduces many new progressive initiatives,

such as the right to physical integrity, the rights of disabled persons, the right to access to the internet, environmental protections, and many more that are in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. These commitments reflect Georgians' aspirations to attain full membership in the European Union and NATO. Georgians understand this to be their destiny, as Georgia has long been an integral part of Europe's broad cultural and historical tapestry.

In parallel with Constitutional reform, we began implementing our four-point reform plan, to ensure quick economic growth.

We launched an ambitious education reform to facilitate links between the educational system and industry, to develop demand based higher and professional education and enhance the economic skills and capacity of the labor force.

Having an innovative society is a key to success for our talented young people. We are investing further in our national ecosystem and integrating it into the global one to open doors and build bridges for our innovators to world markets.

Prudent macro-economic policy has been the foundation of our success in the region's turbulent economic environment. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report now ranks Georgia at 40th in the world, a gain of 97 spots since 2012. This month, Moody's upgraded the sovereign credit rating of Georgia to Ba2, acknowledging that Georgia has successfully overcome the regional shock of 2014-2016.

To increase incentives to invest in Georgia, we have implemented a bold taxation reform, which includes abolishing the profit tax on undistributed earnings and liberalizing the tax administration system. We anticipate

up to 5% economic growth this year, rising to 7% and higher in the coming years.

We are committed to upgrading Georgia's infrastructure. This is important for Georgia to realize its geostrategic aim to serve as a hub for doing business in the region, connecting East and West. Upgrading infrastructure is essential to ensure the rapid delivery of services, achieve efficiency in tourism and logistics, and effectively take goods to market. We see this as a powerful way to create employment that pulls people out of poverty. We have agreed to a multi-year program with the IMF and secured financing for projects worth several billion dollars from international financial organizations.

Georgia - together with Ukraine and Moldova - has signed an Association Agreement with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and achieved visa-free travel to the EU. At the same time, Georgia has become the first country in the region to sign a Free

Trade Agreement with China. On the one hand, we are integrating into the EU internal market and, on the other hand, we are bringing Asian markets closer to us. This enables Georgia to use the full potential of its free trade networks as part of one of the most exciting development ventures of our time.

We are contributing to the One Belt One Road project, which will facilitate trade in high-value goods and services between Europe and Asia, carving significant time from traditional seaborne transport around the peripheries of Eurasia.

Asia and Europe will meet in this grand adventure through the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, which we are implementing together with our Turkish and Azerbaijani partners, and Georgia's new state-of-the-art port on the Black Sea at Anaklia. This deep water port will be capable of handling the largest container ships, which will result in a multifold increase of Georgia's

cargo transit capacity. Anaklia will be developed by multiple international players and will be operated by a renowned American company.

Georgia is now less than 10 days from East Asia and within five days of any point in Europe. We are creating efficient multimodal transit infrastructure which will forge links and processes, and will cement relationships among states and people from Europe to Asia. It represents the fundamental connection between building economic stability for Georgians and achieving a more prosperous and peaceful region.

In a world full of challenges – hot and frozen conflicts, state and non-state aggressions – Georgia is no exception. And here, too, we put our citizens at the center of our strategy. UN members are well aware that the Russian Federation continues to occupy two historic regions of Georgia's sovereign territory in violation of its many international obligations, including dozens of

Security Council and UNGA resolutions.

Since the beginning of 2017, the Russian Federation has intensified its policy of occupation and factual annexation of Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia. It has implemented so-called “integration treaties” and signed so-called “agreements” with de-facto authorities to absorb Georgia’s occupied regions into Russia’s military, political, economic and social systems and accelerated its military build-up in both occupied regions of Georgia. The Russian Federation has intensified the fortification of the occupation lines by installing razor wire fences, trenches, so-called “border signs,” and other artificial barriers. Families have even suffered razor wires cutting through their dwellings or farmyards.

Vulnerable groups, such as people in need of medical care and schoolchildren crossing to get an education in their native language, prohibited in the occupied

regions, have been blocked by closed crossing points. Meanwhile Russia continues to install motion detectors and other technologies to assert full control of all crossings along the occupation line.

Georgia is firmly committed to the peaceful resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict. The Georgian Government complies with the EU mediated Ceasefire Agreement. It has many times reaffirmed its adherence to legally binding non-use of force. Russia has not reciprocated.

Georgia's consistent efforts to find a peaceful solution to this conflict are reflected in the testimonies of many countries and international organizations. I would like to thank world leaders for addressing the need of accelerating peaceful conflict resolution and supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty during this General debate.

Every year the UN General Assembly adopts a resolution reiterating the right of return of all internally displaced persons and refugees to the occupied regions. Georgians are grateful for the United Nations' support, but this has not translated into reality for hundreds of thousands of my compatriots waiting to return to their homes simply because one UN member state refuses to comply with its international obligations.

The Government of Georgia is providing new instruments to rebuild trust with our compatriots living across the occupation line. We are determined to make the benefits of Georgia's European agenda available to the people on the other side of occupation line. Our substantial package of initiatives for those under occupation include providing opportunities for across-Administrative Border Line trade and access to Georgia's free trade opportunities in the global marketplace. We offer them healthcare, education, and other social benefits.

Despite our own challenges, Georgia is a significant contributor to Euro-Atlantic security. Our strategic partnership with the United States has proved to be key for our development and stability and we are committed to deepening our ties further. The EU in its Global Strategy has recognized Georgia's success as prosperous, peaceful and stable democracy, significant contributor in its neighborhood.

We continue our active participation in international operations, including in Afghanistan and in the European crisis management operations in the Central African Republic and Mali.

In 2014, Georgia became a member of Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and joined three counter-ISIS working groups on counter-financing, counter-messaging and foreign terrorist fighters; Georgia is a party to 14 UN antiterrorism conventions, as well as to the European

Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, and fulfills its commitments in this regard.

Georgia is growing. Georgia is vibrant. Georgia is resilient in the face of challenges. Georgia carries its share of responsibility. Georgia is all of these things, because Georgia is its citizens. They are the center of our Government's strategy, and this is where they will remain.

As we have reached for the world, the world has come to us. Our citizens are the beneficiaries of greater connectivity to the world. Their economic success is a prerequisite for sustained well-being and prosperity both at home and well beyond Georgia's borders. I speak today as one steward of our nation, with thanks to all who love and support Georgia. I thank you.

