

STATEMENT by the President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Closing of the General Debate

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

What a week we have had. **196 statements** were delivered from this podium. It is the first time in 11 years that all Member States and Observers addressed the General Assembly. I followed them closely. Many I listened to **firsthand**. When it was not possible for me to do so, I asked my team to send me a report, directly, after every statement was delivered. Thanks of their hard work, I have been able to listen to you all.

I will **not** attempt to **summarize** all 196 statements into this short speech. I would not be able to capture the **diversity** and **complexity** of the issues raised. And I would fail to replicate the **passion** and **experience** which you brought from your own nations, cities, or homes, onto this podium.

I will do three things instead:

1/ I will **focus on people**. I have committed to doing this throughout the next Session, so today is no different.

2/ I will review the **priorities for the 72nd Session**, in light of the input I received from you.

3/ I will look to the **weeks**, and **months ahead**.

Excellencies,

We addressed many **challenges** over the past week. You talked about their impact on the **countries** of the world. Importantly, you also talked about their impact on **people**.

We heard about **people** running from **gunshots** - or the force of exploding **bombs**.

People living for a week on the same amount some of us spend on a cup of coffee.

People forced to make the decision between risking their lives to **stay**, or risking their lives to **flee**.

People wondering when the next **hurricane** will hit, or if their village will be **under water** in a few decades.

People who are beginning to lose – or have already lost– hope in **international peace processes**.

And **people** still waiting for **justice** and **human rights** to become a part of their daily reality.

Your statements didn't just focus on challenges, however. They also spoke of **solutions**. And the people who are working to find them.

We heard accounts of strength, resilience, partnerships, and entrepreneurial spirit.

I want to thank you all for placing **people at the center** of this General Debate. Over the next session, I am confident that we can do even more. We can bring our discussions and actions closer to the people they most affect.

Now I want to focus on the 72nd session in more depth. I knew **my own priorities** before the General Debate began. What I didn't know was how you would respond to them. Let me now outline some of the messages I will be taking away from your statements.

First, I heard overwhelming support for the proposal to **prioritize peace and prevention**. Many of you reiterated the call of the Secretary-General for a **surge in diplomacy** to stop today's conflicts. And you called for the UN to do more to prevent conflicts from breaking out. We must draw from national, regional and international experiences of mediation and conflict prevention. We must realign our approach to emphasize the **peace** in what we now call **peace and security**.

You also stressed your continued support to **UN peacekeeping**. Peace operations are doing a vital job. They work to **protect civilians**. They support **national actors** to build and maintain **peace**. We heard that some of your citizens have paid the **ultimate price** while serving under the UN flag. I want to thank you, on behalf of the General Assembly, for your ongoing commitment.

Second, you talked about **the needs of people** all over the world. You expressed a vision in which **human rights, gender equality, and the rule of law** are **norms**. Today they often unfortunately remain the

exceptions. So, we have **more work to do** in realizing this vision.

I also heard calls for us to **look beyond** the labels of **refugee** or **migrant**, to see, simply, **people**. Many of you told us about the work you are doing for these people, and to support the states and communities hosting them. Additionally, many of you stressed the need for a **comprehensive global framework**.

Third, you reminded us all of the promises we have made to **people and the planet**. Throughout the week, we listened to accounts of the work being done to implement the **Sustainable Development Goals**. Some of you also made clear that **climate change** has become a matter of **life or death** – for people, ecosystems, ways of life and, even, entire countries. It was therefore heartening to witness a major show of support for the **Paris Climate Agreement** in this hall.

Finally, you reaffirmed your **commitment to the UN**. And to each other. You said we are stronger together, in a system based on dialogue and multilateralism. And you stressed that any alternative would risk repeating the mistakes of history.

But many of you also acknowledged two things:

One, that the world is changing. This change is for both good and bad. It is happening at a fast pace.

And two, that the UN must do more to adapt to this change. Over the coming session, we will hear more of your ideas and positions on how this should happen. I am committed to ensuring that our discussions are as **open, inclusive and transparent** as possible.

I want to pause here, to speak frankly. **Not** all of the messages delivered at the General Debate were **positive**. Many of them contained **criticisms** of other countries, or of the UN. But that is part of the package. It is your right to do this. And regardless of size, or population, or economy, all delegations have access to the same platform, for the same amount of time. They can speak freely, without censorship.

We must remember that **differences in unilateral positions** do not prevent **multilateral agreement**. They might give us more work to do. Our negotiations might be more difficult. But they can also

make the **outcome stronger**. So, I want to embrace both the **consensus** and **contention** that came as part of this year's General Debate.

Excellencies,

The only thing left to do is to **look ahead**. The 72nd Session will involve milestones. Some of them are already on the calendar. For example, the **high-level event on Sustaining Peace**, in April, or the adoption of **Global Compacts related to Migrants and Refugees** in September. Already, this week, the General Assembly will convene a **High-level meeting related to trafficking in persons**. This shows our readiness to follow up on mandates inherited from previous sessions –from an early stage. And I'm sure that other major events will happen throughout the year, in response to the initiative of Member States, or in reaction to events happening around the world.

Additionally, the work of the **main committees of the General Assembly** will soon begin. All six committees are important tools for multilateralism. We should make use of them.

Before I conclude, I want to **thank all those who contributed to the General Debate** of the 72nd Session. Thanks to the Member States and observers for standing up here, and outlining their visions. I want to acknowledge the Vice Presidents for their able chairing on my behalf. And I want to say thank you everyone who worked to ensure the smooth running of the Debate and the security of everyone participating in it - in particular our **DGACM colleagues**. These people didn't stand on the podium, but we wouldn't be here without all the work they did - out of the spotlight, and behind the scenes.

I'm sure many of the delegations here today are breathing a sigh of relief. High-level representatives have returned to capital. Schedules no longer contain back-to-back meetings and events. Most of you probably deserve a break.

But the people we all represent –the people I've talked about today – need us to do the opposite.

They need us to focus on action –now more than ever.

So, let's get to work.

And, with that, I thank you again, and bring the General Debate of the 72nd Session to a close.