



BELARUS

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STATEMENT

by His Excellency Vladimir Makei
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus
73rd session of the UN General Assembly
General debate

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Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We live in paradoxical times, when optimism and pessimism equally characterize our life.

Indeed, we have recently endorsed such momentous documents as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Later this year, the international community is bound to give the "green light" to two more instruments that inspire particular hopes for changing the situation in the world for the better. These are the global compacts on refugees and on migrants.

The implementation of these singular initiatives is intended to transform human life on the globe in a most drastic way, to make globalization both fair and a "win-win" phenomenon, as well as to eradicate poverty and preserve the planet for future generations.

The search for answers to global challenges, the quest for ways to address common objectives clearly points out the following – no country can solve them alone. Individual headway is impossible without collective progress.

That is why no matter how justified the criticism voiced against the United Nations is, we still need the Organization as a unique platform for cooperation, as an efficient multilateral mechanism based on the principles that guarantee equal and respectful attitude towards each and every country, its priorities and needs.

What is above all required to assist States in implementing the ambitious goals stemming from the 2030 Agenda are effective "UN country teams", which can furnish governments on their path to sustainable development with result-oriented and rational support. That is exactly where we see the gist of the UN development reform.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Expanding the reach of globalization and streamlining its management in ways that meet both everyone's interest and common good remain a fundamental contemporary task. Yet, certain difficulties can be seen there.

Globalization is accompanied by emerging geo-political and geo-economic fault-lines not just in the regional context, but also on the global scale. A kind of a civilizational trap is taking shape, in which the demands for integration go hand in glove with the manifestations of fragmentation, protectionism and even confrontation.

Located in the center of Europe, Belarus, on the one hand, is a member of the Eurasian economic union, while on the other, it has an interest in pursuing intensive economic cooperation with the European Union. "Squeezed" by the two geopolitical power centers, we fully feel the interplay between geo-politics and geo-economics.

The conflict in Ukraine, the rising tension in the region, sanctions and counter-sanctions weigh heavily on our country, if not often directly, then indirectly, in the form of substantial economic losses.

Belarus, as a middle-sized country with one of the most open economies in the world – because we export up to 60-70 percent of our GDP – is heavily dependent on external markets and international trade.

That is one of the reasons we consistently stand for building a fair, predictable and non-discriminatory trade and economic architecture both in Europe and elsewhere, which would be aligned with the interests of all countries.

We believe that it should be underpinned by multi-tier integration projects.

Owing to its geographical location, Belarus is particularly interested in closer cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union. After all, our western border remains essentially the only economic borderline on the huge space stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, and, in a longer-term perspective, reaching perhaps as far southward as Shanghai.

That is why Belarus has been very consistent in advocating the idea of "integration of integrations" as the principle of cooperation oriented around a common search for optimal ways towards unifying economic growth and sustainable development.

Attaining the Goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda, with its overriding promise to leave no one behind, requires particular attention and international support to Middle-Income Countries.

It is precisely this group of countries that hosts five out of the world's total seven billion people, that wields the greatest potential for economic growth, and that is indispensable when it comes to ensuring global sustainability.

On the other hand, it is within this group where the three quarters of the world's poor reside. It is the MICs that are most vulnerable to such factors as global economic fluctuations, consequences of regional conflicts, natural and man-made catastrophes, climate upheavals, epidemics, which all combine to threaten social and economic stability and widen inequality, including at the regional and global levels.

It is, thus, unfair that progress in development is being gauged exclusively on the basis of a per capita income. This criteria reflects neither economic, nor social, nor environmental specifics inherent to Middle-Income Countries.

It is obvious for Belarus that the multidimensional nature of the challenges faced by the countries of this category, to which Belarus also belongs, requires the application of multidimensional development criteria that will also be instrumental in designing the UN system's result-oriented strategies.

Belarus hopes that the High-level meeting gathered to comprehensively discuss these issues, which the President of the UN General Assembly plans to convene very soon, will produce a serious impetus for the United Nations to proceed with specific measures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, another multidimensional issue is increasingly coming into our focus. Humanity has entered a new age as digital technologies drastically change our lives. The importance of digital economics for sustainable and inclusive economic growth is well grasped in our country. Last March, the Presidential decree "On the development of the digital economy", whose ambition is to turn Belarus in an "IT-country", has entered into force. The Belarus' Park of High Technologies has been growing fast, demonstrating record high rates of growth in residents and exports alike.

Digital technologies are fairly compared with "rocket fuel" for national economies. They make rapid absorption of innovation into human activities, including education, consumption, and social cooperation feasible. Moreover, digital technologies stimulate business activity, they generate significant revenues, and they create new jobs.

At the same time, the digitization clearly leads to drastic changes in the labor market, doing away in the process with a whole array of professions unrequired in the new environment, thereby making many people involved in the relevant sectors and industries extremely vulnerable.

Clearly, governments in advanced as well as in many developing countries will confront soon a number of tasks, specifically, how to adjust their own economies to the global digital transformation, how to manage these processes at the national level effectively, and how to cope with inadvertent ramifications spurred by digitization.

With this in mind, Belarus proposes to engage in international cooperation on digitization and technological foresight in ways that facilitate sustainable development.

The purpose of this cooperation is to assist developing countries in finding a niche of their own in the global digital economy, to multiply the benefits stemming from digitization, and to make sure that they are to be distributed in an equal and fair manner.

We thus welcome the establishment by the Secretary-General of the High-Level Panel on digital cooperation and hope that the Panel will pay particular attention to building states' capacities in this area.

It is absolutely clear that strengthening such capacities would be fruitless unless the effort is predicated on such values as sustainability and prosperity for all. It is precisely these values that profoundly underlie those tasks that the world's countries can accomplish only together.

Unfortunately, it is also these values that have often been sacrificed to the logic of confrontational thinking, which we encounter more and more.

At the 2015 UN Summit the President of Belarus contended that sustainable development would be unattainable in the absence of a lasting peace and security. The point is utterly relevant today.

True sustainability cannot be achieved outside the security framework, which is being tested for resilience day in and day out.

All share in the threat posed by terrorism. Combatting it effectively requires embracing a comprehensive approach whereby all countries uphold the principles of international law and shun double standards.

We welcome and stand willing to support the UN leaders' efforts to build a single front against terrorism. Our country's contribution to the relevant global unifying processes will be a High-level international conference on preventing terrorism in the digital age, organized by Belarus and the OSCE, which is to be held in Minsk in a week's time (9-10 October).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Speaking about international security generally, one cannot help taking note once again of something evident. The world is facing today unprecedented challenges and threats. The confrontation in international relations increasingly evokes the notion of a new "Cold War. What is more, one increasingly hears the voices about likelihoods under which weapons of mass destruction may be used, even if as a result of an inadvertent conflict or an accident.

This points to the crisis of diplomacy and seriously undermines the UN authority as the key international organization tasked with preventing international conflicts.

The "degree" of divergence in relations among a number of great powers has reached a "boiling" point. When it comes to some issues, the situation reaches the point of absurdity. The UN's principal organs, first and foremost, the Security Council are turned into an arena for confrontation and political self-assertion, with confrontation prevailing over dialogue, and geopolitical ambitions taking the upper hand *vis-a-vis* common sense.

Like many in this hall, I, regrettably, do not have recipes for how to mend the matters.

But we are deeply convinced: there is no choice other than to forge a global order on the basis of "shared values". It is patently clear, however, that it is impossible to arrive at "shared values" by means of coercive "democratization" and violence that are invoked for the purpose of undermining legitimate authorities.

The bitter geopolitical experience accumulated over the past three decades tells us that something in which all of us have a common interest should constitute the foundation for such values.

We think that the idea of stability may serve as this paradigm.

Bringing stability means stopping the unwinding spiral of geopolitical chaos in its tracks.

What needs to be done to this end?

First, what stability implies is that states retain their role as the primary international actors and that state sovereignty is respected.

The contemporary international law is predicated on these key principles enshrined in basic United Nations documents. In its essence, it is about, on the one hand, the right of states to choose their own form of political governance, as well as their own path and priorities of development, while, on the other hand, it is about non-interference of countries in each other's internal affairs.

Unfortunately, these principles are not universally adhered to. The politics of sanctions, economic coercion and political isolation against so called "rogue regimes" has found a solid ground in many countries' foreign policy toolkits.

We have all been witnesses to decades-long policies of economic, trade and financial blockade applied against a freedom-loving Cuba, which not only run counter to UN resolutions, but take a heavy toll on that country's social and economic development.

Second, stability is also about strengthening the state, as well as its role in domestic affairs.

We are absolutely convinced that only a "strong" state can provide security and wellbeing for its population. We believe that people living in places where "real" authority is absent, can bear out this truth better than anyone else.

Therefore, if we really have an interest in ensuring global stability, we should not undermine the state, but must rather contribute to making it stronger.

Finally, stability very much relates to relations among great powers, which today must learn once again to listen to others and hear others' arguments, in addition to be willing to embrace reasonable compromises.

In the past, it was great powers that had determined the destinies of the world. Today, they certainly do not enjoy such an exclusive prerogative. Still, unity among great powers in relation to "shared values" and their leadership in advancing them is the *sine qua non* for progress in many areas.

Guided by this logic, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko came up last year with the initiative to begin a comprehensive international security dialogue. Its objective is to overcome existing controversies that plague inter-state relations in the Euro Atlantic and Eurasia.

We are convinced that only dialogue can help resolve the deep crisis of trust in international relations and produce mechanisms conducive to peace and international security, as well as to sustainable development.

Mr. President,

Can one day or one meeting change history? The great Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru called this moment a "tryst with destiny".

I think that the common task lying before us is to increase the number of such moments.

Namely, what we must do is, by means of a common effort, to seek common solutions that will be acceptable to everyone.

Thank you for your kind attention.