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**Speech by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands,
His Excellency Mr. Mark Rutte
on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands**

New York, 20 September 2017

Mr President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies,
fellow delegates,
ladies and gentlemen,

Every era, every decade has its problems, great and small. The problems we face now seem overwhelming. These days, many people worry about the future. And that's understandable. The last few years have been marked by terrorist attacks all over the world. In countries like Myanmar, Syria, the Central African Republic and Yemen, the population is suffering as a result of wars and conflicts. More and more people are fleeing their homes because of violence, scarcity or poverty, leaving behind everything they have. Only recently, floods claimed lives in the United States and Asia, and hurricane Irma has left a trail of destruction in its wake, including in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Nuclear issues are once again a major concern, and geopolitical tensions are increasing. That is the picture today. But if you take a long-term perspective – and as a historian, I like to do that – there are grounds for optimism.

This building here in New York – UNHQ – is concrete proof that progress is possible. Here in this inviolable international zone, thousands of people from every continent work together to foster peace, justice and development, in a world governed by international law. And that's no easy task – far from it. But advances are being made. Sometimes it's three steps forward and two steps back, but if you take a long view, you can see clear progress.

Think back to when the UN was established in 1945. Europe lay in ruins, as did Asia. Two nuclear bombs had been dropped on Japan. The Cold War was round the corner, and would hold the world in its grip for decades. But the destruction caused by two world wars united the nations of the world in a shared belief that it should never happen again.

Franklin D. Roosevelt put it this way in February 1945: 'The point in history at which we stand is full of promise and danger. The world will either move forward toward unity and widely shared prosperity – or it will move apart.'

The world of today is a much better world. And not just geopolitically. In 2015 we took stock of the progress we'd made on the Millennium Goals. Extreme poverty and maternal mortality had been halved, child mortality had been almost halved, 90% of children in developing countries now receive primary education.

So despite all the very real problems that confront us today, I still see grounds for optimism. We can't change the world overnight, but we can improve the lives of individuals step by step. And we are doing so.

The UN plays a crucial role in these achievements. The UN is the only organisation where everyone sits at the table – and remains there. And while other institutions struggle with an increasing lack of credibility, faith in the added value of the UN remains strong among the world's citizens. We must not let them down.

The Netherlands and its kingdom partners Curaçao, Aruba and St Maarten have always attached great importance to cooperation within the UN. Our small, outward-looking kingdom could not exist without strong multilateral institutions and an effective international legal order. As a trading nation our prosperity depends on a stable world. And after the MH17 disaster, and attacks in neighbouring countries, the people of the Netherlands are increasingly aware that our domestic security depends on cooperation with other countries. It is very important to the Netherlands, and to the victims' next of kin, that justice is seen to be done for those who perished on flight MH17. It has been agreed that the next step – the prosecution and trial of those responsible – will take place in the Netherlands. To make this possible we are of course working with all the countries involved.

The problems confronting today's world – climate change, migration, food security, terrorism and cybercrime – are by definition international. No single country can tackle them in isolation. We need each other. So instead of becoming more inward-looking, as united nations we need to take a step outwards. In this turbulent world, the importance of the UN is growing every day.

Next year, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will be even more focused on the UN. In January 2018, we begin our one-year term on the Security Council, taking over from Italy. This shared arrangement is a good example of European partnership within international organisations. We'd like to see more such cooperation. Our two countries even share some of the same priorities, like tackling people-smuggling in Libya, an issue that is of great concern to Europe.

Next year, as a temporary member of the Security Council, we have set three priorities: a strong UN in a secure and sustainable world. And we will work in a transparent way to achieve this goal, each element of which is equally important.

The first priority, a strong UN, is essential. For this, reform and modernisation are crucial. As the new Secretary-General António Guterres has said, 'The onus falls on the UN to prove its worth'. He has been active from Day One, working to adapt the UN to new realities. His ambitious agenda inspires confidence for the future. The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports his vision and approach, and I would like to take this opportunity to call for a joint effort to implement his reform plans. It's time to follow through. And I don't only mean the Secretary-General, but all of us here in this great hall. Saying that the onus falls on the UN means that the onus falls on us.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands wants to see a more effective and efficient UN, with better cooperation between the various agencies. After all, the fields in which the UN is active – human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development goals – are all inextricably linked. The Netherlands already works in this way. We call it the 3D approach: an integrated effort to tackle development, defence and diplomacy.

We would also like to see the role of the Resident Coordinator reinforced. And the UN will have to work in a results-oriented way, adopt a more modern personnel policy and bolster its internal transparency and accountability. These are all issues which we will press for in the coming period.

Our second priority next year is of course security. The key word here is 'prevention'. We are not devoting enough attention to the early stages of conflict development. That has to change. We need an organisation equipped and ready for action at all stages of conflict. This is already happening in the MINUSMA mission in Mali, in which the Netherlands is participating, and will continue to participate in 2018. What is new is that we are using intelligence to carry out long-range reconnaissance missions. In this way we can anticipate conflict, instead of waiting for it to come our way.

We see MINUSMA as a model for future missions. For this, however, we need not only better intelligence, but also task-oriented training for UN personnel, high-grade equipment and a clear mandate. This year the Kingdom of the Netherlands is co-organising the UN Peacekeeping Conference in Vancouver. There we will press for rotation schedules to ensure timely deployment and rotation of both personnel and materiel. This will make countries more willing to participate and extend the potential life span of a mission.

Another issue on which the UN is rightly focusing more and more is counterterrorism. After all, the UN is the prime forum for global norm-setting and international cooperation in the field. When it comes to preventing terrorism, cooperation is key. A good example of such cooperation is the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which the Netherlands co-chairs, together with Morocco. In it, 29 countries work together to achieve a single goal: to keep our citizens safe. And it's producing concrete results. For instance, at least 60 countries and the UN now contribute foreign terrorist profiles to Interpol. Interpol already has over 16,000 profiles. When the GCTF was set up, it had fewer than a thousand. This work is not high-profile – most of it goes on behind the scenes – but it saves many lives.

Prevention of violence and conflict ties in with our third priority: sustainability. And with it, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs precede everything I have just discussed. They are the ultimate prevention agenda. They address the drivers and root causes of instability and conflict. Investing in human dignity, eradicating poverty, fostering climate resilience and promoting economic and social progress will reduce the incidence of conflict, instability and despair. Development and lasting peace – all in one package.

The Netherlands and its kingdom partners Curaçao, Aruba and St Maarten are working together to implement the SDGs. We believe that the key to success in attaining these goals is our willingness to form partnerships at national and international level, with businesses, civil society organisations, knowledge institutions, local authorities and youth organisations. Working together across sectors is part of our countries' tradition.

Our most important area of expertise is water management. Much of the Netherlands lies below sea level, so we have centuries of experience in water technology, urban delta management and maritime technology. Expertise that we're keen to share with the rest of the world.

Working together on water issues is more crucial than ever before. It's nearly five years since thousands of people here in New York had to flee their homes when the streets flooded in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. The destruction caused by Harvey in Texas and the floods in Asia show that water issues have only become more urgent in the last five years. The impact of climate change on the water cycle is brought home to us every day, all over the world, sometimes violently. The people of St Maarten in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom are still struggling to cope with the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma.

The UN predicts that by 2050, 200 million people will have become displaced because of climate change. Water plays a key role in almost all SDGs. We learn most by working with others and by sharing knowledge. We deploy our expertise all over the world, for example in projects in Vietnam, Peru, Myanmar and Bangladesh. It's one of the reasons why I'm a member of the High-Level Panel on Water.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This hall, this building – all of you – represent one of the greatest achievements of mankind. All the nations working together in partnership to foster peace, justice and development in the world. This is a unique organisation, and that entails a heavy responsibility. In these turbulent times, the UN needs to prove its worth more than ever.

Adlai Stevenson, an American politician who experienced two world wars and died when the Cold War was at its height, once said: 'The United Nations is like a spade; it is not self-operating. It is what we make of it, for purposes that we can find in common with our neighbours in the world.' I couldn't agree more. We face great problems in the present age. Conflict and natural disasters affect the lives of many, and cause widespread concern. In this unstable world, the UN represents stability and a chance to shape the world for the good. So we need to make progress with the reforms proposed by Secretary-General Guterres.

Consider what we have achieved in recent decades. As they say, past results are no guarantee of future performance. But they do represent a promise for the future. Let's do all we can to make good that promise.

Together we make the UN a success. In the year ahead, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will commit itself fully to this endeavour.

Thank you.