

**Address by H.E. Mr. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine,  
at the general debate of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly  
(22 September 2021)**

***Dear Mr. President! Dear heads of state and government! Ladies and gentlemen!***

It's time to wake up!

This is the appeal of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, to the world leaders, to you and me on the eve of the Assembly. For me, this call is special.

For me, every night before the UN General Assembly is a sleepless night.

In 2019, this was the excitement before the first speech. 2020 in general was a sleepless year for the world through COVID-19. And about last night I will tell in more detail. 3 am. Dozens of calls. There was an attempt on the life of the first aide to the President of Ukraine. 12 shots. Three of them hit the driver.

Here is the price of change in the state, here is the price of reforms.

Fortunately, Serhiy is alive. Fortunately, nothing threatens the driver's life for now. But this speech of mine will be atypical for the UN. Although I believe - definitely useful for each of you.

Is it time to wake up?

I can say without flattery and cunning: Ukraine did it a long time ago, since then it has not fallen asleep. It did not fall asleep when it survived the Holodomor, Babyn Yar. Did not fall asleep when the whole world survived two wars, the Holocaust, lost 100 million people. This was the price for humanity to realize that all nations, all countries are equal, and all conflicts must be resolved through dialogues and only through dialogues, not tanks. Believing this, in 1945 Ukraine became one of the founding members of the United Nations. Today, they would be shocked to see the words "ensure the rights of all peoples" in the theme of the General Assembly. I'm sure they would say, "What have you been doing all these 76 years?"

The answer was given by COVID-19. We played equality, we played unity, where it's one thing to share common goals, and it's another to share vaccines together. Life-giving vaccines. It turned out that in articles about equality, as in advertising, there are stars and the inscription in small print: "We are all people, we are all in the same boat, but lifeboats will first be given to the 1st class passengers."

Ukraine did not expect help from others. And helped others without waiting for gratitude. We sent our doctors to Italy, sent the necessary assets. Ukraine helped everyone who needed it at a time when the world had forgotten that the pandemic would not last forever, and that all nations would one day gather here again. But how will they look each other in the eyes now? Ukraine is not ashamed.

It has the right to say: we want to revive the UN. To begin with, its Charter must be revived. These are not recommendations that can be followed at will. You will not find the words "Every man for himself" there. And then the world would not have to admit that it failed the test of COVID-19, the test of unity. And it would not have to hide face on the 20th anniversary of the UN Durban Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Who could have imagined that drugs would one day be an instrument of discrimination? In the context of constant conversations about the global food crisis, it is interesting: will we ever share bread and water in the same way?!

Are we waking up? I want to believe that.

Because COVID-19 was not completely overcome. And the global vaccination plan has not gone anywhere. Plus, the guarantees that there will be no new viruses in the world are as "strong" as the security guarantees of the Budapest Memorandum.

Is it time to wake up? Honestly - Ukraine did not fall asleep. It is difficult to do so due to the sounds of explosions, the sounds of shots being heard in our occupied Donbas for the eighth year in a row. In 2019, I said from this rostrum: the war in Ukraine is more than 13 thousand dead. 30 thousand wounded. Imagine: one and a half million people are forced to leave their homes. Every year these figures are heard in the UN with only one amendment - every year, unfortunately, these figures are growing. I talked about this in 2020. And I'm talking about it now, in 2021. And this is almost 15 thousand people killed already. And even more wounded. And even more homeless people.

Here is the price of freedom, here is the price of independence.

Probably shots are not heard as loudly in Central Park or Madison Square Garden as in Avdiivka industrial zone or Svitlodarsk Arc. Do we want to revive the UN? Perhaps the UN should move for this? Be mobile and fast? Perhaps it's time for us to meet where we can really hear and see these global problems? There are thousands of trouble spots throughout the world. Ukraine is ready to participate in UN meetings alongside any of them. In my opinion, the truth is needed to revive the UN.

If all those in power had sincerely supported the peace-loving efforts of the world community, shells would not have exploded on Afghan land today, and machine guns would not have terrorized the civilian population.

These are the words of Leonid Kravchuk, the first President of independent Ukraine, said 30 years ago at the 46th UN General Assembly.

30 years were not enough for humanity for these words to lose their relevance.

One day was enough for Ukraine to start an operation to rescue civilians in Kabul.

Our military evacuated almost 700 people. These are citizens of Ukraine, as well as citizens of many other, different countries, members of human rights organizations, journalists of various media: Global Mail, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Stars and Stripes. They were men, women, children, elderly people from different countries, of different nationalities, of different religions.

This, I believe, is a commitment to the basic principles of the United Nations.

The participation of 46 states and international organizations in the first Summit of the Crimea Platform on the de-occupation of Crimea is a commitment to the core principles of the United Nations. And I am very grateful to each of these countries.

And the fact that the UN has ignored the platform for solving the problems of international law and occupation is some new, unapproved principles. If we want to revive the UN, let us remember that there are no chosen ones here who cannot be offended. The UN is all of us, it's 193 countries.

And I invite all these countries to join the joint declaration of the participants of the Crimea Platform, condemning the occupation and showing that you are against the forceful change of borders in the world.

This is not irony or trolling, but this format will always be open to Russia. And I'm ready to explain why.

Because no one in the world feels safe anymore. I emphasize: no one feels safe. And no one can hide behind international law like behind a stone wall. This can lead to the collapse of the entire architecture of international relations. Then we really won't have any rules, except for the right of the strong. It will be a world in which, instead of collective work, selfishness will dominate, a world in which there will be more and more dictatorship, and less and less equality, less real democracy and freedom.

After all, what is state sovereignty? First of all, it is a question of freedom, free choice of one's own destiny for each person, for the people, for the state.

All I have said now in Russian is the words of Russian President Vladimir Putin said in Munich in 2007 and at the UN General Assembly in 2015.

Were they untrue?

Unfortunately, we know Moscow's answer. In early September this year, Nariman Dzhelyalov, the first deputy chairman of the Crimean Tatar People's Mejlis, was illegally detained in Crimea. Russia accuses this political scientist, prominent journalist, TV presenter, teacher of law and history of trying to blow up a section of the gas pipeline.

Here is the price of freedom, here is the price of fighting for your rights, for human rights.

I really count on the support of the international community in the issue of his release and the release of about 450 Ukrainians illegally detained in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and in the Russian Federation.

I urge you to support the updated resolutions on the human rights situation in the occupied Crimea and the militarization of our Ukrainian occupied peninsula, which will be submitted to the General Assembly by the end of the year.

We are grateful that the item on the "Situation in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine" was included in the agenda of this Assembly. Although how, remaining occupied, Crimea and Donbas can disappear from the agenda?! This is obvious not only to us. I thank all the states that mentioned Ukraine in their speeches here this year. It is very important. And many others who are not ashamed that Ukraine is their friend and partner. Who can a spade a spade: call occupation occupation, and call aggression aggression, without fear that someone will leave this hall for everyone to see. It is not necessary to do this, it is a platform for dialogue. It will definitely not bring happiness to Ukraine. It could bring happiness to Ukraine if someone left our state territories, our state borders for everyone to see.

In 1945, the Yalta Conference was held in Crimea, where new foundations of the world order were laid and it was decided to hold the first Conference on the Establishment of the United Nations. Both Yalta and Crimea have been occupied for eight years now.

How do we want to revive the UN if the place where the idea of the UN emerged has been occupied by a permanent member of the UN Security Council? Mr. President of the 76th Assembly spoke a lot about climate change and the protection of the environment and nature on the planet. In this context, Crimea needs even more UN's attention. They made a military base out of unique nature. Instead of fauna and flora there is a fleet and soldiers. And in the souls of the Crimean people, there is a problem opposite to the world - not global warming, but global devastation.

We should admit, the world does not have enough time to sort all problems out. The UN raises very important issues and does not have time to solve them, because new important topics are emerging. Every time we seem to choose a "global disaster of the year". Which in a year few people will remember, because there will be a new one. Every Assembly the world puts them in a large backpack of threat, which it has been bearing for years and which is already overfilled. If we look even deeper - there is famine, poverty, literacy, drinking water, clean air, occupation in it. We don't have enough time to solve this. And most importantly - we lack the courage. Because we act not as leaders, but as politicians.

Who are simply afraid that someday humanity will call them to answer. And they leave a way out - we did not promise you anything. We did not promise to overcome famine. We said that we would make every effort to overcome it. We did not promise to overcome climate change. We promised to intensify our cooperation to overcome climate change. How much time, paper, energy have we spent on these "we are determined", "we have confirmed a common interest in overcoming", "we have agreed to significantly strengthen cooperation"? We want to revive the UN? Let's talk to each other simply, let's speak clearly, concretely, and most importantly - honestly, frankly. Then we will stop calling the UN General Assembly a "debate." This is not a debate. Because debate is a lively dialogue. This is an active dispute between different parties. This is an opportunity to ask direct, frank questions. For example, issuing hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians in the occupied territory of Ukraine hundreds of thousands of passports of another state. Isn't it evidence of an international crime? Isn't it proof of impunity and disrespect for international law? Moreover, the Russian Federation itself officially declares it. And it forces our citizens of Ukraine to take part in the elections to the Russian parliament.

And if the UN does not react efficiently and strongly to this...

Isn't it proof that it is too late to revive the UN?

But I believe it is not. And the UN must support those who want to change the world for the better. Today, Ukraine is presenting a number of initiatives, platforms and summits. Let's take only one - the Crimea Platform. It must work under the auspices of the United Nations. If every nation has such an effective platform, approved by the UN, which solves problems and works 24/7, that means reviving the UN. Because it means to revive faith in the UN among ordinary people.

Ladies and Gentlemen! I understand that criticism of the UN is often heard. But we criticize ourselves.

The UN is not a building, the UN is the leaders. And it was they who created the UN 76 years ago.

Could they have predicted and anticipated everything? I'm sure not.

Could they have imagined that the veto mechanism as a symbol that "one can be right for all" would become a tool when one could blackmail everyone. No.

Does this mean that everything is lost? I'm sure not.

We, and therefore the UN, just need to believe in ourselves again.

The UN has long heard only criticism. The accusation that the UN can do nothing.

And the worst accusation is that "the UN has become a League of Nations."

And today the UN is like a retired superhero who has forgotten what he could do. He considers himself a burden, a weak, frail, useless old man, whose life was in vain. Or maybe the UN will remember something?

How has more than a billion people accessed drinking water for the first time since 1981?

Who explained to the wild world that everyone has rights? And that they need to be protected. Who gave the first document, where they are described in detail?

Who provides food to 90 million people in 83 countries?

Thanks to whom did the shame called apartheid disappear from the planet?

Whose "blue helmets" have maintained and continue to maintain peace in dozens of countries? Who created UNESCO, which protects the Vatican, Versailles, the Acropolis and a total of 1154 unique cultural heritage sites? Who created UNICEF, which protects children in more than 190 countries? Children are the most important for us.

Therefore, the call to unite for them cannot be banal or outdated. Unite for the sake of children. The most important thing we have.

What do you say, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Heads of State and Government? Let's show that we are determined to make every effort to strengthen our interaction!

And let's just do it. Even without resolutions, declarations, coordination of positions. Just do it.

As people.

As nations.

As united nations!

As those who made their choice.

Their actions will either be filled with substance or these chairs will be empty.

Here is the price of this choice!

Thank you!