

Address
by H. E. Gitanas Nausėda
President of the Republic of Lithuania
at the UNGA 77th Session
New York, 20 September 2022

Dear President of the General Assembly,

Dear Secretary General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Standing in front of this honorable assembly of world nations I wanted to speak about peace. About challenges that the world is facing today: income inequality, pandemics, climate change. Unfortunately today I have to speak about war. The war in Europe. The war which only deepens - not resolves - all other issues.

Ever since the founding of the United Nations, its central idea has been bringing countries together and ensuring peaceful coexistence. After the terrible sufferings of the Second World War, addressing global threats to international peace and security was the overriding concern.

We owe a lot to those past leaders who struggled to recreate global order out of profound disorder. The darkest hour in human history inspired creating the rules which remain essential to the global co-existence of nations.

For the first time in our history, peace had finally become a global value to be protected. Against all odds, the language of military aggression and conquest was condemned.

In the context of global challenges we often talk about human rights. But what about the right of countries to be sovereign and to defend their territorial integrity?

On the 24th of February a UN Security Council permanent member started an unjustified, unprovoked, and illegal war against a neighboring country. This gross violation of international law undermined the very essence of the United Nations.

For the last seven months, Russia's war against Ukraine has been taking a terrible toll on the Ukrainian people. Many thousands have been tortured and killed, millions were displaced or forced to flee their homeland.

However, this war has not broken the will of the brave Ukrainian people to defend their country. It has not diminished their fighting spirit. Massacres at Bucha and Izyum have not brought them to their knees [nyz]. The inherent love for freedom, passed from one generation to another, is still there. Undefeated. Unspoiled.

Despite all challenges, Ukrainians proved to be remarkably strong defenders of liberty and democratic values. Inspired by their heroic struggle, the international community should take an even more active role to booster Ukrainian resilience to withstand this hardship.

Every UN member is expected to respect the rules of international order we have been creating through decades. But it is only up to us to decide what is still tolerable and what is not. Where are the red lines and were the red lines crossed.

For how can we tolerate a member of international community in a war of conquest and annihilation? A country that is deliberately attacking the rules-based world order. A country whose actions make it more difficult for us all to maintain peace and security across the globe.

Today I call on all of you. Look at what is happening in Ukraine. Look at it attentively. Who is the aggressor and who is the victim? Behind the mask of an “energy superpower” there is a dangerous imperial power seeking to occupy and annex its neighbors. Searching for reasons to justify that annexation. Rewriting history. Using economic and energy blackmail. Spreading disinformation and propaganda.

We all know that Russia’s violations of the founding principles of the United Nations did not start seven months ago. Destructive actions have undermined international security for many years. Breaching arms control treaties. Using prohibited chemical weapons both at home and abroad. Continually violating the territorial integrity not only of Ukraine but of Georgia and Moldova as well. Interfering in the elections of other countries. These are just a few examples.

The ongoing suffering of the Ukrainian people was further amplified by Russia’s proxy – the Belarusian [*belarusijan*] regime. It has enabled military attacks of other country from its territory. It continues to provide support for offensive operations against Ukraine. Unfortunately, it has surrendered the Belarusian national sovereignty to its big neighbour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These past few months have also revealed the danger of a looming nuclear disaster in Europe. The deployment of Russian military personnel and weaponry at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant is alarming and totally unacceptable. It disregards the safety and security principles that all members of the International Atomic Energy Agency have committed to respect. A nuclear power plant should never be used as a military base!

Moreover, Russia's irresponsible rhetoric on the possible use of nuclear weapons directly contradicts its role as a P5 [*py faiv*] state and the commitment it has made in the January P5 Leaders' Statement on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races. We see a huge gap between declarations and real actions which undermines the trust in one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

We must collectively condemn such actions and require it to immediately and unconditionally withdraw all troops from the entire territory of Ukraine. It must also stop irresponsible and dangerous nuclear rhetoric and behavior. This should include withdrawing military and other personnel from the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power Plant.

Therefore, Lithuania welcomes the active personal involvement of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in this regard. His visits to Ukraine demonstrate supreme dedication to the ideals of the United Nations.

Lithuania notes that the efforts of the Secretary-General and Türkiye [*tiurkije*] were instrumental in reaching the deal to resume Ukrainian grain exports. We also acknowledge the positive role played by other actors such as the African Union leadership in coming to this arrangement.

This is an achievement shared by the whole community of nations. Once again, international efforts have helped us to avert a global catastrophe. Grain exports via Ukrainian ports will sustain and feed millions of people.

Let us not doubt – it was the war in Ukraine that threatened to trigger a global hunger. We cannot rest assured that this danger will not come back until the Russian armed forces are withdrawn from the whole territory of Ukraine.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There must be no impunity for the brutal crimes and atrocities committed during the war. Guaranteeing justice and accountability is of vital importance from the standpoint of credibility of the United Nations and the international community.

We should consolidate and advance our legal efforts. We must ensure that all those responsible for this unprecedented assault on Ukrainian and European peace and security are held accountable.

Lithuania will continue to engage in accountability mechanisms to address the mass atrocities being committed in Ukraine. I call on the global community to establish the Special Tribunal to address the war crimes. It is also crucially important to ensure effective forms of reparations for the victims of these crimes.

Finally,

We must take into consideration that the war in Ukraine is an extension of the wider context.

What we can see in Russia is a further decline of civil liberties as well as the growing brutality of repressions. The human rights situation is deteriorating. Independent media and non-governmental organizations are being simply banished.

Similar developments are taking place in Belarus. Systematic and widespread attacks target civil society, human rights defenders, and independent media. The number of political prisoners in Belarus has exceeded one thousand two hundred - and continues to grow. This is truly alarming and requires more attention from the international community.

Lithuania has provided asylum to Russians and Belarusians – representatives of non-governmental organizations and independent media – who were persecuted in their home countries.

For Lithuania, the time of the business-as-usual approach is gone. We have demonstrated it by building the energy independence and proceeding faster with the green transition. I invite all countries to stop financing the bloody war by buying aggressor's energy resources. It would significantly affect its ability to continue this brutal war.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the first days of this terrible war, Lithuania has been supporting Ukraine. We have not been silent. We have stepped up to help Ukraine in every way we can. Our government as well as civil society have been active in providing both military and humanitarian aid. We have taken in more than sixty thousand refugees, mostly women and children. To help them maintain a sense of belonging, we have established a Ukrainian center in Vilnius – the first center of its kind outside Ukraine.

This war must end. But not in a peace at any cost. The Ukrainian territorial integrity has to be fully restored. Any other outcome would mean further atrocities and long-standing insecurity.

While the aggressor has already demonstrated its eagerness to endanger the global population, we should not allow ourselves to be frightened. The danger is real. As history shows, to push back against the aggressor is the only viable option!

Today I remain a strong believer in the transformative power of collective action. It is based on the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Together we can ensure global peace and security. Together we will make a difference.

Let me assure you: Lithuania is – and will always be – a valid partner in fighting for the right cause. In fighting for the long-lasting peace.

Thank you!