

Speech by Prime Minister Rutte during the United Nations General Assembly in New York

23 September 2022

Mr President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Growing up in Europe as a child of the Cold War, the Iron Curtain was a fact of life.

I still vividly remember when the first breaches began to appear in the mid-1980s.

The credit for that shift, which made a profound impression, was largely due to Mikhail Gorbachev, who passed away a few weeks ago.

Although he represented a dogmatic, undemocratic and oppressive system, he had the courage, as a matter of principle, to choose freedom and humanity.

I mention that memory here for a reason.

As Russia's recent past – and Mr Gorbachev's legacy – have shown, we always have to make a choice.

The choice between 'might is right' and – in the words of the great Dag Hammarskjöld – 'an international community living in peace under the laws of justice'.

That is my message today: working together 'under the laws of justice' is, and will remain, the only path to a safe and prosperous world.

That is why Russia's aggression must be stopped.
And right now Russia stands on the wrong side of history.

That is my message today: working together 'under the laws of justice' is, and will remain, the only path to a safe and prosperous world. That is why Russia's aggression must be stopped. And right now Russia stands on the wrong side of history.

It's hard not to think of historical analogies, where one powerful country with expansionist ambitions invades other countries under the false pretense of victimhood and security.

Let me be very clear: Russia is not the victim here, it is the aggressor.
And the whole world knows it.

No one was invading Russia. No one was threatening the Russian people.
The people of Ukraine wanted only to be left in peace. To decide their own future.

Again, there is only one aggressor here, and that is Russia.

For too long, we assumed that it was pure rhetoric when Mr Putin said that the end of the Soviet Union was 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe'.

In hindsight, we should have paid heed to his words, because they reflect a dangerous worldview.

He won't stop at Ukraine, if we don't stop him now This war is bigger than Ukraine itself.

It's about upholding the international rule of law.

It's about a sovereign people's right to choose its own path.

It's about freedom.

Theirs and ours.

So this war is about our common future.

And there's only one path for us to follow, one right choice to make.

We must uphold the fundamental principles of the UN Charter.

Principles we agreed to after the painful lessons of history, learned from a past aggressor.

This year, the NATO and European Union allies are more united than ever in our determination to stop Putin.

And all UN member states should be united in condemning this unprovoked

war.

Because Russia's unbridled aggression is an assault on the UN Charter and the international rules-based order.

An assault on the very foundations of our partnership.

And so an assault on the security of us all.

The Ukrainian people are fighting for their freedom, one stride at a time.

I have great admiration for Ukraine's achievements on the battlefield.

Ukraine is gaining ground. This shows that our military assistance is working.

It motivates us to do even more.

In the past week, Putin made a speech that can only be described as a sign of panic. A sign of weakness. He is losing his own ill thought war, and he knows it.

That's why he clutches onto his delusionary narrative, full of lies and deceit. His words were meant to intimidate, but they leave us cold.

Putin's latest threats to invoke its nuclear capabilities are intended to sow division in the growing unity that the world is showing. But he will not succeed.

Together with our allies, the Netherlands will continue supporting Ukraine.

In any way we can.

However long it takes.

Every inch of the way.

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So I call on each of you – all the UN member states – to stand firm for the principles we laid down in the UN Charter.

And to stand firm until peace, freedom and territorial integrity are fully restored in Ukraine.

That must be followed by rebuilding the country, and achieving justice for those who have suffered from the war. And the crimes and human rights violations arising from it.

From sexual violence to deportation, torture and random killing.

The horrific crimes committed in Bucha – which I visited – and other places, must not go unpunished.

I reiterate, the empty Russian threats leave us cold. But what does not leave

us cold is the suffering of the people of Ukraine. And frankly also the suffering of Russian people, who are called up to fight against their will. Every week we're seeing more evidence of atrocities, like in the recently liberated city of Izium. The world cannot and will not stand by and do nothing.

There can be no justice without accountability.

The Netherlands and the city of The Hague – the legal capital of the world – feel a special responsibility in this regard.

We have already supported fact-finding missions by sending forensic experts to Ukraine, in close cooperation with the International Criminal Court.

And last July we hosted the Ukraine Accountability Conference, where 45 countries agreed on key priorities in guaranteeing justice for Ukraine.

We know from experience that achieving international justice can be a long and painstaking process.

For more than eight years now, we have been closing in on the Russians responsible for the downing of flight MH17 in eastern Ukraine.

I'm grateful for the unwavering support we've received from Ukraine and many other countries in our fight for justice for the 298 victims and their families.

And I promise you this: the Netherlands will continue working hard to ensure justice for Ukraine as well.

By the same token, we stand firmly with those in Russia who oppose the war.

Who long for peace and justice, who do not want to send their children into a senseless war, and whose voices are not being heard.

And we will also support those people all over the world who are suffering the effects of the war indirectly.

Putins' war has created not only thousands of victims in Ukraine, but also hundreds of thousands – perhaps even millions – of victims of hunger and poverty around the world.

Here too, the UN family must hold Russia to account.

Putins' cold-blooded power politics – exploiting the most basic human needs of so many people – provides an extra argument for ending the fossil-fuel era even faster than we planned.

It makes tackling that other great global issue – climate change – even more urgent.

And here too, worldwide cooperation is an absolute must.

Together we have made pledges aimed at keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

And around the world we all feel the urgency of this task.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands – which is made up of four very different countries – is also feeling the effects of climate change.

From heavier rainfall and worsening drought in the European part of the Kingdom, to more severe hurricanes and rising sea levels in the Caribbean part.

Small Island Developing States are at the forefront of the world's climate-adaptation strategies.

And Curaçao, Aruba and St Maarten – the island countries of our Kingdom – are no exception.

We are experiencing both the challenges confronting mainland Europe and those which Small Island Developing States face every day: rising ocean temperatures, coral bleaching, loss of biodiversity and ocean pollution.

As one Kingdom, we know that water is the factor linking all the great challenges of our time, from food and energy to migration and urbanisation. What's more, 90 per cent of all climate disasters manifest themselves through water, via flooding, drought or pollution.

Many parts of the world are already facing the reality of having too much or too little water, or water supplies that are too polluted.

Recent events in Pakistan are a sobering reminder.

Devastating floods, disrupting the lives of more than 30 million people.

This illustrates once again that water is at the heart of many global problems.

It has the power to turn our lives upside down.

To threaten our health, our safety, our food, and our living environment.

But at the same time, collaborating on water issues presents us with a big opportunity to make the world safer, healthier and more prosperous. Investing in water security should be a top priority for our common future. Because worldwide water solutions are an existential issue, making them a basic necessity for the world.

It is our responsibility to place water security at the core of all our climate action- and at the core of our worldwide efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

That is why the Kingdom of the Netherlands – together with our friends from Tajikistan – will be hosting next year's UN Water Conference.

This Conference is all about action.

Action by governments and the private sector, working closely across sectors and regions.

It can and must be a turning point.

Because it's now or never.

So I urge you all to be there.

And in the meantime we will need to step up our other climate efforts, too. We will have to rapidly deliver on the promises we made last year in Glasgow.

COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh will be another milestone, if only because it will mark the first time we are convening on the African continent.

Earlier this month I met with African leaders in Rotterdam, at the Africa Adaptation Summit.

Our discussions further impressed on me the importance of climate action for Africa.

The EU member states remain fully committed to a 55-per-cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, and a swift transition to clean energy.

The Netherlands is also working to combat deforestation and to help the world meet its 100-billion-dollar pledge on climate finance.

That money needs to go to the most vulnerable individuals and communities.

To those hit hardest by climate change.

We will continue to provide expertise and financial support to protect

vulnerable areas against the elements.

Developed countries have a responsibility to help developing countries take the necessary measures.

Only by acting together can we turn things around.

And that's why the Netherlands will continue pressing for a doubling of finance for climate adaptation.

Half of all the money my country spends on international climate action now goes to adaptation and resilience.

And we will continue on that path, because adaptation is in our DNA.

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Cooperation is the only way forward, with the UN as a vital tool.

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To quote Dag Hammarskjöld once more:

The UN is what the Members make it, reflecting the weakness of all human effort but also the high aspirations and noble achievements of men of good will all over the world.

That is why the Netherlands supports Our Common Agenda, as a framework for promoting peace, security and sustainable development.

We will continue working every day to build broad coalitions to address the major issues of our time.

Coalitions in which water is our common bond.

In conclusion, together we can and must defend, protect and reinforce the international rules-based order. Putin's war of aggression must be stopped.

We cannot go back to an age of imperialist wars, of mass atrocities and mass

graves.

To those still on the fence: you have a choice. Now is the time to speak out.
Now is the time to be on the right side of history.

Thank you.

Source:



Rijksoverheid