

# Sweden's National Statement at the General Debate of the 77th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

24 SEP 2022

Address by Foreign Minister of Sweden Ann Linde at the General Debate of the 77th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 24 September 2022, New York

Mr President, Excellencies,

Times of crisis require the best of us. When warnings sound, action must follow. Only then will development be sustainable, and peace maintained.

Honest reflection on the gravity of the challenges must be followed by determined commitments to address them. That is what respecting the UN Charter means and what multilateralism is all about.

Mr President,

We are all aware of the immense tasks facing us.

Almost 350 million people in more than 80 countries face acute food insecurity, trying to merely survive the day instead of making plans for tomorrow. Some 50 million people in 45 countries are on the brink of starvation.

Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals is halting, leaving millions of women, men and children behind. Extreme poverty is on the rise for the first time in two decades. The world is in the midst of an accelerating climate and environmental crisis, and the effects of

the ongoing pandemic continue to afflict individuals and societies around the world.

A permanent member of the Security Council has launched an unprovoked, unjustified and illegal aggression against a neighbouring country. This was done in blatant disregard of its international obligations and the human suffering that extends far beyond the immediate war zone.

Mr President,

As UN Member States, we also know what is required of us.

The General Assembly has come together to demand that Russia “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders”. The General Assembly has reaffirmed Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Today, Sweden reiterates this demand in the strongest possible terms, alongside other EU Member States, transatlantic partners, and countries around the globe.

The war in Ukraine must stop, and Russia’s troops withdraw. The fake “referenda” on Ukrainian territory would be illegal and will have no effect. Neither partial mobilisation, nuclear sabre rattling, nor any other escalation will deter us from supporting Ukraine. Humanitarian law and principles must be upheld, and Ukraine’s nuclear power plants protected from Russia’s illegal and reckless attacks. Accountability for the heinous crimes committed must be ensured. International law must be upheld and decisions by UN bodies respected.

Mr President,

Russia’s aggression has severely escalated the food security, energy and financial crises.

Governments and societies already struggling to cope with the consequences of climate change, conflicts and the pandemic now face even more serious challenges. Because of the actions of one country, more than one and a half billion people in more than half of the UN Members States find themselves at greater risk of poverty, starvation and indebtedness.

In short, the global relief, recovery and resilience needs are immense. Sweden and the EU have scaled up our own contributions to meet them.

To save lives and alleviate suffering where needs are the greatest, Sweden has increased its humanitarian assistance to a record high USD 950 million this year. We commend the efforts of the UN Secretary General and the President of Türkiye on the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Under the Initiative, some fifty thousand tonnes of wheat will, thanks partly to Swedish funding, soon leave the port of Odesa, bound for millions of women, men and children at risk of famine in Yemen.

A significant part of Sweden's ambitious aid budget has been directed to the UN, as an investment in global peace, security and development, and the multilateral system itself.

Our actions are firmly anchored in the 2030 Agenda with the SDGs and in the Paris Agreement, which are now more important than ever.

It is time to raise our ambition and accelerate action to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss, or we'll fail not only future generations, but also our own.

At the international meeting Stockholm+50 in June this year, countries came together to follow through on recommendations and actions. Sweden has spearheaded the climate transition through innovation and green investments, and an ambitious increase in climate aid.

Mounting evidence shows that climate change also leads to greater risks to peace and stability. A solid foundation for advancing climate security is in place, at the UN and in regional organisations. The OSCE took key decisions last year during the Swedish Chairpersonship, and the EU is scaling up.

The nuclear threat is alarmingly present, and Russia's actions lower the threshold in a way that increases the threat facing us all.

In January this year, the leaders of all five Nuclear Weapons States committed to the prevention of nuclear war and avoiding arms race. They affirmed that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. Russia's irresponsible actions and nuclear rhetoric since then severely undermines the credibility of its commitment to this pledge. It is also deeply troubling that Russia broke consensus on the draft outcome document of the NPT Review Conference.

The countries of the Stockholm Initiative have presented ideas to heed the call from the UN Secretary-General to bring disarmament and non-proliferation back to the top of the international agenda.

Mr President,

The world is in a gender equality recession.

Regrettably, the rights, resources and representation of women still cannot be taken for granted. Violence against women and girls has increased. Access to safe and legal abortion has suffered major setbacks. And one year after the Taliban takeover, the situation for women and girls in Afghanistan has turned into a nightmare, in an unparalleled system of discrimination.

At the same time, more and more states are acknowledging that a gender perspective is needed to meet global challenges.

As we gather for the first in-person UNGA high level week since the outbreak of COVID-19, we must do everything in our power to prevent another pandemic.

Sweden and the EU have made substantial contributions to global vaccination. Last year alone, Sweden committed over USD 600 million to global health. The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response has set out clear recommendations for action. We should make use of them.

Mr President,

A year ago, the UN Secretary-General presented his blueprint for a modern multilateral system. Our Common Agenda is an accelerator of the SDGs, a launch pad for a New Agenda for Peace and a way towards a more inclusive, modern, and networked UN.

It was us Member States who called for the report – and as Member States we should do our collective best to act upon it.

The establishment of a new youth office is a fitting first decision – this is an agenda for the future. And the Transforming Education Summit earlier this week was another important step towards implementation.

We look forward to similar progress on other recommendations, from investments in peace-building and strategic foresight, to digitalisation and a global economy that benefits all by being fair and open. We must keep up the momentum until we realise our ambitions, at the Summit of the Future in 2024.

Mr President,

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has caused the greatest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War, aggravating the already serious refugee situation globally.

This military invasion of a country in our neighbourhood – in violation of the very same international law that is to protect us all from aggression – has also fundamentally changed Sweden's security environment.

In response to this seriously deteriorated security situation, the Swedish Government decided on 16 May to apply for NATO membership. The decision has broad national support and was made following extensive consultations among political parties. It was taken in tandem with Finland. And the decision is anchored in a firm belief that security is best built together with others.

When I signed our formal request for NATO membership, I noted the fundamental changes to our defence and security policy. But I also stressed the importance of the continuity of our ambitious global and multilateral foreign policy.

This enduring global commitment is also reflected in the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU. During the first half of 2023, Sweden will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We look forward to further strengthening the EU's global role, and deepening cooperation with partners around the world. We will work to protect, promote and defend democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. And we will reinforce the already solid EU-UN relationship to seek multilateral solutions.

We lend our full support to Denmark's candidacy to serve as an elected member on the UN Security Council 2025 to 2026. Their campaign message – equality, security, action – is a message from all the Nordic countries.

Mr President,

It must be safe to work for peace, security, development and human rights.

So far this year, there have been 176 attacks against humanitarian workers and 47 have been killed. More than 50 peacekeepers have lost their lives while serving on UN missions.

A few months ago, the UN Secretary-General and I inaugurated a work of art – in this very building – in memory of Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, who were murdered while working for the UN in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In too many countries, civil society representatives, human rights defenders and journalists are threatened, subjected to violence or even killed for expressing their opinions or for reporting on current events.

The global trend of democratic backsliding must be reversed, and the vicious circle of lack of democracy, disrespect for human rights and disregard of the rule of law broken. Investing in democracy, means investing in peace and sustainable development.

Efforts must continue to bring clarity to the circumstances of the death of former Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld, and his crew. We fully support the work of the UN appointed independent investigator.

Mr President,

To echo the topic of this debate, we are at a watershed moment.

We are witnessing a full-scale war in Europe. Across the globe, armed conflict and repression cause suffering and halts development. We are not doing enough to tackle the climate crisis. Too many people are facing hunger, being forced to flee their homes, dying from curable diseases and living in fear or under oppression.

We, the United Nations, must make sure there is a different story to tell next year.

It won't be easy. But it is possible – if we heed the call to meet interlocking challenges with transformative change. If we act when warnings sound.

Thank you.

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