



STATEMENT

by

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President
of the Slovak Republic

General Debate

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Dear President of the General Assembly,

Dear Secretary General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This organisation has a clear purpose, as spelled out in Article 1 of the UN Charter. *‘To maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations among nations, and to achieve international cooperation.’*

Today, most of you would probably agree that we are still far from achieving this goal. But that does not mean we should not try.

Each and every member of the UN has a responsibility to protect peace. In this, the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council have a special duty. Instead, today, we see one of the five Permanent Members openly denying the right of another UN member, Ukraine, to exist as an independent state. Those who break the rules themselves have no authority to set rules for others, through their power of veto.

The wrongs of Russia’s aggression could not be clearer. 141 countries deplored Moscow’s war against Ukraine in a General Assembly resolution. No veto at the Security Council can change the fundamental truth. The truth that today, rather than protecting global peace, Russia is doing everything to undo it.

Moscow’s aggression has inflicted harm on the entire world. Thousands of innocent Ukrainian civilians have been killed. Millions had to leave their homes, triggering one of the largest refugee crisis in Europe’s history. 50 million people are on the brink of starvation in Africa and Asia. Russia’s blockage of Ukraine’s ports and confiscation of its harvest has made the already grave global food crisis even worse. We welcome the deal mediated by the Secretary-General Guterres and Türkiye. And we call on Russia to fully unblock all Ukraine’s ports. Otherwise, the world will continue to suffer.

The democratic world and all of us must be a voice of Ukraine. The voice that won’t be silent, voice that will continue to testify about Russia’s crimes in Ukraine. The voice that will remember, and that will act - so no one is ever allowed to commit such atrocities again.

Excellencies,

Vladimir Putin hoped to conquer Ukraine and scare the rest of us. In this goal, he has failed, as Ukraine's recent successes on the battlefield demonstrate. We will rebuild peace. To do so, we must learn from our past mistakes. This is not the first time we have seen aggression in Europe. Russia has occupied parts of Georgia since 2008 and parts of Ukraine since 2014. Our response to these actions was incomplete. Concerns about our own comfort weakened our resolve. The tepid sanctions we imposed failed to discourage Russia from trying again. Our weakness encouraged more aggression.

We must not repeat the same mistake again. The ignorance of rules is poisoning global security, and it must not be allowed to stand.

More than 50 countries, including all members of the European Union, have already imposed tough sanctions on Russia. Slovakia is Ukraine's direct neighbour - our own security is impacted by this war. We are neither the biggest nor the richest country in the world. We have long been dependent on Russia's energy supplies. But we chose the protection of our fundamental rules. We have imposed sanctions on Russia and are supporting Ukraine including through military aid. Because Ukraine's fight is just and defensive, in line with international rules and its rights as a UN member. I invite all of you to join: we should all help Ukraine, politically, militarily, financially. Because this is the only way how we can restore peace.

Honourable Members,

Russia's war in Ukraine is not the only crisis exposing the gap between the rules and commitments we agreed on and their practical realisation. In November, we will have already the 27th COP summit in Egypt. But our actions remain dangerously behind our words. Our greenhouse gas emissions are not falling fast enough. How much more scorched Earth, how many millions more climate refugees, how many flood victims does it take to convince us that ignoring our commitments is no longer an option?

We are desperately behind in cutting our emissions. Worse, we hear voices that argue that climate crisis must wait because of increasing energy prices. This would be a grave mistake. Yes, the price increases

are painful and we must help those who risk losing access to energy to heat their homes or cook their meals.

But we must not lose sight of the bigger picture. We are talking about the rising prices of commodities, which we must phase out anyway to stop the planet's warming. Rather than bring back subsidies for coal or gas, we must transition away from them. Renewable energy is less dependent on those who are trying to use gas or oil as an energy weapon. And it is cheaper. Despite the current energy crisis, Slovakia stops using coal as a source of energy next year. We are investing in renewables and launching a retrofitting programme for buildings to boost energy efficiency. Because the cheapest energy is the one you do not use.

We can only do this together, globally and in solidarity with each other. We need all big economies to join and help those who need it. At this year's COP27, we need a significant increase of funds for lower and middle-income countries. Many of them contribute very little to our planet's heating but suffer the most from its consequences.

Excellencies,

As the world community, we have put short-term comfort over lasting solutions when it comes to two crises: that of international peace order, and that of our climate. But there is a third crisis of relativization of values, facts and expertise, as well as a decrease of trust in democratic institutions. We are facing an epidemic of lies, propaganda and disinformation.

It is hardly new, but thanks to the rise of social media, it is more powerful. If algorithms favour hatred over truth or nonsense over science, if they appeal to our instincts rather than the greater good, what hope is there for global understanding? Or for the sort of cooperation that the UN has been created to advance?

Democracies are tolerant by default. But they die if they start tolerating intolerance. Along with the rest of the European Union, Slovakia leads the way for an effective and democratic regulation of major social platforms and online media. Online space should be guided by the same democratic rules that apply offline. We welcome UN initiatives for

rules for state behaviour in cyberspace. The efforts towards a so-called Digital Geneva Convention are justified and needed.

The crises I mention have a disproportionate impact on women and girls. This plays out in higher rates of gender-based and domestic violence, greater economic insecurity and poverty or worse access to education and health care. However, I am not here to portray women as victims. I am here to call on all of them to step up their engagement in public affairs. Women are agents of change. The world has a collective responsibility to support them. Because we are already seeing the consequences of a world that is run without taking their unique and diverse experience into proper account.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Time has not been very favourable to the ideas that built and sustain this organisation. The peace we should safeguard is fraying in Ukraine. The international cooperation we should foster has not prevented a climate catastrophe. And the spirit of shared global commons that the UN embodies is under attack from extremists, their voice multiplied by new technologies. Half measures are not enough to cope with these challenges. We have tried that before. It is time for action and for clarity.

We, the members of the UN, need to clearly side with victim over aggressor. We must choose international rules-based order over the power of gun. We must urgently deliver on our climate goals. And find working rules for social media platforms to protect the fabric of our societies and the international order. Sure, we can delay and compromise. But again, history teaches us that passivity and ignorance never solve crises, they only delay the moment of reckoning. And since obeying even the smallest of rules matters, let me finish here to respect the agreed time limit.

Thank you.