

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 20 September 2022

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Our world is in big trouble.

Divides are growing deeper.

Inequalities are growing wider.

Challenges are spreading farther.

But as we come together in a world teeming with turmoil, an image of promise and hope comes to my mind.

This ship is the Brave Commander. It sailed the Black Sea with the UN flag flying high and proud.

On the one hand, what you see is a vessel like any other plying the seas.

But look closer.

At its essence, this ship is a symbol of what the world can accomplish when we act together.

It is loaded with Ukrainian grain destined for the people of the Horn of Africa, millions of whom are on the edge of famine.

It navigated through a war zone -- guided by the very parties to the conflict -- as

part of an unprecedented comprehensive initiative to get more food and fertilizer out of Ukraine and Russia.

To bring desperately needed relief to those in need.

To calm commodity markets, secure future harvests, and lower prices for consumers everywhere.

Ukraine and the Russian Federation – with the support of Türkiye – came together to make it happen -- despite the enormous complexities, the naysayers, and even the hell of war.

Some might call it a miracle on the sea.

In truth, it is multilateral diplomacy in action.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative has opened the pathway for the safe navigation of dozens of ships filled with much needed food supplies.

But each ship is also carrying one of today's rarest commodities: Hope.

Excellencies,

We need hope and more.

We need action.

To ease the global food crisis, we now must urgently address the global fertilizer market crunch.

This year, the world has enough food; the problem is distribution.

But if the fertilizer market is not stabilized, next year's problem might be food supply itself.

We already have reports of farmers in West Africa and beyond cultivating fewer crops because of the price and availability of fertilizers.

It is essential to continue removing all remaining obstacles to the export of Russian fertilizers and their ingredients, including ammonia. These products are not subject to sanctions – and we will keep up our efforts to eliminate indirect effects.

Another major concern is the impact of high gas prices on the production of nitrogen fertilizers. This must also be addressed seriously.

Without action now, the global fertilizer shortage will quickly morph into a global food shortage.

Excellencies,

We need action across the board.

Let's have no illusions.

We are in rough seas.

A winter of global discontent is on the horizon.

A cost-of-living crisis is raging.

Trust is crumbling.

Inequalities are exploding.

Our planet is burning.

People are hurting – with the most vulnerable suffering the most.

The United Nations Charter and the ideals it represents are in jeopardy.

We have a duty to act.

And yet we are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction.

The international community is not ready or willing to tackle the big dramatic challenges of our age.

These crises threaten the very future of humanity and the fate of our planet.

Crises like the war in Ukraine and the multiplication of conflicts around the globe.
Crises like the climate emergency and biodiversity loss.

Crises like the dire financial situation of developing countries and the fate of the Sustainable Development Goals.

And crises like the lack of guardrails around promising new technologies to heal disease, connect people and expand opportunity.

In just the time since I became Secretary-General, a tool has been developed to edit genes.

Neurotechnology – connecting technology with the human nervous system – has progressed from idea to proof of concept.

Cryptocurrencies and other blockchain technologies are widespread.

But across a host of new technologies, there is a forest of red flags.

Social media platforms based on a business model that monetizes outrage, anger and negativity are causing untold damage to communities and societies.

Hate speech, misinformation and abuse – targeted especially at women and vulnerable groups – are proliferating.

Our data is being bought and sold to influence our behaviour – while spyware and surveillance are out of control – all, with no regard for privacy.

Artificial intelligence is compromising the integrity of information systems, the media, and indeed democracy itself.

Quantum computing could destroy cybersecurity and increase the risk of malfunctions to complex systems.

We don't have the beginnings of a global architecture to deal with any of this.

Excellencies,

Progress on all these issues and more is being held hostage to geopolitical tensions.

Our world is in peril – and paralyzed.

Geopolitical divides are:

Undermining the work of the Security Council.

Undermining international law

Undermining trust and people's faith in democratic institutions.

Undermining all forms of international cooperation.

We cannot go on like this.

Even the various groupings set up outside the multilateral system by some members of the international community have fallen into the trap of geopolitical divides, like the G-20.

At one stage, international relations seemed to be moving toward a G-2 world; now we risk ending up with G-nothing.

No cooperation. No dialogue. No collective problem solving.

But the reality is that we live in a world where the logic of cooperation and dialogue is the only path forward.

No power or group alone can call the shots.

No major global challenge can be solved by a coalition of the willing.

We need a coalition of the world.

Excellencies,

Today, I want to outline three areas where the coalition of the world must urgently overcome divisions and act together.

It starts with the core mission of the United Nations – achieving and sustaining peace.

Much of the world’s attention remains focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The war has unleashed widespread destruction with massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The latest reports on burial sites in Izyum are extremely disturbing.

The fighting has claimed thousands of lives. Millions have been displaced. Billions across the world are affected.

We are seeing the threat of dangerous divisions between West and South.

The risks to global peace and security are immense.

We must keep working for peace in line with the United Nations Charter and international law.

At the same time, conflicts and humanitarian crises are spreading – often far from the spotlight.

The funding gap for our Global Humanitarian Appeal stands at \$32 billion – the widest ever.

Upheaval abounds.

In Afghanistan, the economy is in ruins, over half of all Afghans face extreme levels of hunger, while human rights – particularly the rights of women and girls -- are being trampled.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, armed groups in the east are terrorizing civilians and inflaming regional tensions.

In Ethiopia, fighting has resumed underscoring the need for the parties to immediately cease hostilities and return to the peace table.

In Haiti, gangs are destroying the very building blocks of society.

In the Horn of Africa, an unprecedented drought is threatening the lives and livelihoods of 22 million people.

In Libya, divisions continue to jeopardize the country.

In Iraq, ongoing tensions threaten stability.

In Israel and Palestine, cycles of violence under the occupation continue as prospects for peace based on a two-state solution grow ever more distant.

In Myanmar, the appalling humanitarian, human rights and security situation is deteriorating by the day.

In the Sahel, alarming levels of insecurity and terrorist activity amidst rising humanitarian needs continues to grow.

In Syria, violence and hardship still prevail.

The list goes on.

Meanwhile nuclear saber-rattling and threats to the safety of nuclear plants are adding to global instability.

The review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty failed to reach consensus and a nuclear deal with Iran remains elusive.

But there are some glimmers of hope.

In Yemen, the nationwide truce is fragile but holding. In Colombia, the peace process is taking root.

We need much more concerted action everywhere anchored in respect for international law and the protection of human rights.

In a splintering world, we need to create mechanisms of dialogue to heal divides.

That is why I outlined elements of a new Agenda for Peace in my report on Our Common Agenda.

We are committed to make the most of every diplomatic tool for the pacific settlement of disputes, as set out in the United Nations Charter: negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement.

Women's leadership and participation must be front and centre.

And we must also prioritize prevention and peacebuilding.

That means strengthening strategic foresight, anticipating flashpoints that could erupt into violence, and tackling emerging threats posed by cyber warfare and lethal autonomous weapons.

It means expanding the role of regional groups, strengthening peacekeeping, intensifying disarmament and non-proliferation, preventing and countering terrorism, and ensuring accountability.

And it means recognizing human rights as pivotal for prevention.

My Call to Action on Human Rights highlights the centrality of human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

In all we do, we must recognize that human rights are the path to resolving tensions, ending conflict and forging lasting peace.

Excellencies,

There is another battle we must end – our suicidal war against nature.

The climate crisis is the defining issue of our time.

It must be the first priority of every government and multilateral organization.

And yet climate action is being put on the back burner – despite overwhelming public support around the world.

Global greenhouse gas emissions need to be slashed by 45 percent by 2030 to have any hope of reaching net zero by 2050.

And yet emissions are going up at record levels – on course to a 14 percent increase this decade.

We have a rendezvous with climate disaster.

I recently saw it with my own eyes in Pakistan – where one-third of the country is submerged by a monsoon on steroids.

We see it everywhere.

Planet earth is a victim of scorched earth policies.

The past year has brought us Europe's worst heatwave since the Middle Ages.

Megadrought in China, the United States and beyond.

Famine stalking the Horn of Africa.

One million species at risk of extinction.

No region is untouched.

And we ain't seen nothing yet.

The hottest summers of today may be the coolest summers of tomorrow.

Once-in-a-lifetime climate shocks may soon become once a year events.

And with every climate disaster, we know that women and girls are the most affected.

The climate crisis is a case study in moral and economic injustice.

The G20 emits 80 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions.

But the poorest and most vulnerable – those who contributed least to this crisis – are bearing its most brutal impacts.

Meanwhile, the fossil fuel industry is feasting on hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies and windfall profits while household budgets shrink and our planet burns.

Excellencies,

Let's tell it like it is.

Our world is addicted to fossil fuels. It's time for an intervention.

We need to hold fossil fuel companies and their enablers to account.

That includes the banks, private equity, asset managers and other financial institutions that continue to invest and underwrite carbon pollution.

And it includes the massive public relations machine raking in billions to shield the fossil fuel industry from scrutiny.

Just as they did for the tobacco industry decades before, lobbyists and spin doctors have spewed harmful misinformation.

Fossil fuel interests need to spend less time averting a PR disaster – and more time averting a planetary one.

Of course, fossil fuels cannot be shut down overnight.

A just transition means leaving no person or country behind.

But it is high time to put fossil fuel producers, investors and enablers on notice.

Polluters must pay.

Today, I am calling on all developed economies to tax the windfall profits of fossil fuel companies.

Those funds should be re-directed in two ways: to countries suffering loss and damage caused by the climate crisis; and to people struggling with rising food and energy prices.

As we head to the COP 27 UN Climate Conference in Egypt, I appeal to all leaders to realize the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Lift your climate ambition. Listen to your people's calls for change. Invest in solutions that lead to sustainable economic growth.

Let me point to three.

First, renewable energy.

It generates three times more jobs, is already cheaper than fossil fuels and is the pathway to energy security, stable prices and new industries.

Developing countries need help to make this shift, including through international coalitions to support just energy transitions in key emerging economies.

Second, helping countries adapt to worsening climate shocks.

Resilience-building in developing countries is a smart investment – in reliable supply chains, regional stability and orderly migration.

Last year in Glasgow, developed countries agreed to double adaptation funding by 2025. This must be delivered in full, as a starting point.

At minimum, adaptation must make up half of all climate finance.

Multilateral Development Banks must step up and deliver. Major economies are their shareholders and must make it happen.

Third, addressing loss and damage from disasters.

It is high time to move beyond endless discussions. Vulnerable countries need meaningful action.

Loss and damage are happening now, hurting people and economies now, and must be addressed now -- starting at COP 27.

This is a fundamental question of climate justice, international solidarity and trust.

At the same time, we must make sure that every person, community and nation has access to effective early warning systems within the next five years.

We also must address the biodiversity crisis by making the December UN Biodiversity Conference a success.

The world must agree on a post-2020 global biodiversity framework – one that sets ambitious targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, provides adequate financing and eliminates harmful subsidies that destroy ecosystems on which we all depend.

I also urge you to intensify efforts to finalize an international legally binding agreement to conserve and sustainably use marine biological diversity. We must protect the ocean now and for the future.

Excellencies,

The climate crisis is coming on top of other heavy weather.

A once-in-a-generation global cost-of-living crisis is unfolding, turbocharged by the war in Ukraine.

Some 94 countries – home to 1.6 billion people – many in Africa -- face a perfect storm: economic and social fallout from the pandemic, soaring food and energy prices, crushing debt burdens, spiraling inflation, and a lack of access to finance.

These cascading crises are feeding on each other, compounding inequalities, creating devastating hardship, delaying the energy transition, and threatening global financial meltdown.

Social unrest is inevitable – with conflict not far behind.

It doesn't have to be this way.

A world without extreme poverty, want or hunger is not an impossible dream. It is within reach.

That is the world envisaged by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

But it is not the world we have chosen.

Because of our decisions, sustainable development everywhere is at risk.

The SDGs are issuing an SOS.

Even the most fundamental goals – on poverty, hunger and education – are going into reverse.

More people are poor. More people are hungry. More people are being denied health care and education.

Gender equality is going backwards and women's lives are getting worse, from poverty, to choices around sexual and reproductive health, to their personal security.

Excellencies,

Developing countries are getting hit from all sides.

We need concerted action.

Today, I am calling for the launch of an SDG Stimulus – led by the G-20 -- to massively boost sustainable development for developing countries.

The upcoming G20 Summit in Bali is the place to start.

This SDG stimulus has four components:

First, Multilateral Development Banks – the World Bank and regional counterparts – must increase concessional funding to developing countries linked to investments in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The banks themselves need more finance, immediately.

They then need to lift their borrowing conditions and increase their appetite for risk, so the funds reach all countries in need.

Developing countries, particularly Small Island Developing States, face too many obstacles in accessing the finance they need to invest in their people and their future.

Second, debt relief.

The Debt Service Suspension Initiative should be extended – and enhanced.

We also need an effective mechanism of debt relief for developing countries – including middle-income countries – in debt distress.

Creditors should consider debt reduction mechanisms such as debt-climate adaptation swaps.

These could have saved lives and livelihoods in Pakistan, which is drowning not only in floodwater, but in debt.

Lending criteria should go beyond Gross Domestic Product and include all the dimensions of vulnerability that affect developing countries.

Third, an expansion of liquidity.

I urge the International Monetary Fund and major central banks to expand their liquidity facilities and currency lines immediately and significantly.

Special Drawing Rights play an important role in enabling developing countries to invest in recovery and the SDGs.

But they were distributed according to existing quotas, benefitting those who need them least. We have been waiting for redistribution for 19 months; the amounts we hear about are minimal.

A new allocation of Special Drawing Rights must be handled differently based on justice and solidarity with developing countries.

Fourth, I call on governments to empower specialized funds like Gavi, the Global Fund and the Green Climate Fund.

G20 economies should underwrite an expansion of these funds as additional financing for the SDGs.

Excellencies,

Let me be clear: the SDG Stimulus I am proposing is only an interim measure.

Today's global financial system was created by rich countries to serve their interests. It expands and entrenches inequalities. It requires deep structural reform.

My report on Our Common Agenda proposes a New Global Deal to rebalance power and resources between developed and developing countries.

African countries, in particular, are under-represented in global institutions.

I hope Member States will seize the opportunity to turn these ideas into concrete solutions, including at the Summit of the Future in 2024.

Excellencies,

The divergence between developed and developing countries – between North and South – between the privileged and the rest – is becoming more dangerous by the day.

It is at the root of the geopolitical tensions and lack of trust that poison every area of global cooperation, from vaccines to sanctions to trade.

But by acting as one, we can nurture fragile shoots of hope.

The hope found in climate and peace activists around the world calling out for change and demanding better of their leaders.

The hope found in young people, working every day for a better, more peaceful future.

The hope found in the women and girls of the world, leading and fighting for those still being denied their basic human rights.

The hope found throughout civil society seeking ways to build more just and equal communities and countries.

The hope found in science and academia, racing to stay ahead of deadly diseases and end the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hope found in humanitarian heroes rushing to deliver lifesaving aid around the globe.

The United Nations stands with them all.

We know lofty ideals must be made real in people's lives.

So let's develop common solutions to common problems — grounded in goodwill, trust, and the rights shared by every human being.

Let's work as one, as a coalition of the world, as united nations.

Thank you.
