



**Address by His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State and Head of the Delegation of the Holy See
at the General Debate of the High-Level Week at the Opening of
the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
New York, 24 September 2022**

**A WATERSHED MOMENT: TRANSFORMATIVE SOLUTIONS TO
INTERLOCKING CHALLENGES**

Mr. President,

I am pleased to extend to you and to the Representatives of Nations gathered here the warm greetings of Pope Francis. It is good to be together again in person after the separation imposed upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic.

When I addressed this preeminent gathering virtually last year, I spoke of the dark clouds hanging over humanity.¹ A year later, while some of those clouds have lifted, other, darker clouds have gathered. Armed conflicts currently afflict our world to an extent not seen since 1945, with around two billion people living in conflict-affected areas and millions more forcibly displaced.² In addition to the misery caused by violence and cruelty, and the anxiety arising from the threat of nuclear escalation, our world continues to face the challenges of climate change, mixed migration, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, while food insecurity and water scarcity now affect large portions of the global population.

As the title of our general debate indicates, we stand at a watershed moment and together must seek “transformative solutions to the interlocking challenges we face”.

No one can deny that “the great challenges of our time are all global.”³ At the same time “alongside the greater interconnection of problems, we are seeing a growing fragmentation of solutions [...which] only fuels further tensions and divisions, as well as a generalized feeling of uncertainty and instability.”⁴ We can all identify with this observation, which Pope Francis made earlier this year. However, how then can we overcome that sense of “uncertainty and instability”?; Where to begin?

First and foremost, we need to recover “our sense of shared identity as a single human family,” rooted in the inalienable dignity that we hold in common. If we do not

¹ Cf. FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, Chapter 1.

² Data are from the SG’s remarks for the meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, 30 March 2022.

³ FRANCIS, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 10 January 2022.

⁴ Ibid.

focus on what unites us, seeking to promote the common good, there will only be “growing isolation, marked by a reciprocal rejection and refusal that [...] endangers multilateralism”.⁵ Indeed, it is here, at the Headquarters of the United Nations, the multilateral forum *par excellence*, that we are called to work together to restore, as Pope Francis requested, that “diplomatic style that has characterized international relations from the end of the Second World War.”⁶ It is not merely a question of preserving the reputation of the institution, but rather making sure it is best able to implement its foundational charter and respond to the challenges faced by humanity.

Mr. President,

When Pope Saint Paul VI visited this chamber on the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations, his heartfelt plea was broadcast around the world: “jamais plus la guerre, jamais plus la guerre!”⁷ – “no more war, no more war!” Alas, decades later, the hard-fought progress this institution achieved in the past century in reducing the prevalence of armed conflict globally has been questioned in recent years.

This reversal deeply concerns the Holy See. Speaking of the post-Second World War consensus that understood the need to “lay the foundations of a new era of peace,” Pope Francis recognized that “unfortunately—we never learn [and] the old story of competition between the greater powers continue[s].” In short, the perennial logic of self-interest prevails—seeking to extend economic, ideological and military influence.⁸

And yet, the Holy See strongly believes in multilateralism and the irreplaceable role of the United Nations. For that reason, Pope Francis, in line with his predecessors, speaks repeatedly in support of this Organization, while at the same time encouraging a process of renewal, and calling on Governments to heed the plea of those countries and peoples, who suffer most from the consequences of its current limitations.⁹

Mr. President,

This General Assembly has been working on the revitalization of various aspects of its work for some time.¹⁰ This effort reflects a healthy instinct, for, as time passes, all institutions need to examine themselves in light of their foundational principles, missions, and mandates. For the United Nations, this process takes place against the backdrop of a crisis of credibility, arising not only from its apparent impotence in times of crisis, but also from the promotion of agenda in many fora that frequently shift the focus “to matters that by their divisive nature do not strictly belong to the aims of the Organization.”¹¹ In fact, these agenda express a “reject[ion of] the natural foundations of humanity and the cultural roots that constitute the identity of many peoples.”¹² Pope Francis has called this “ideological colonization”. Unfortunately, in the day-to-day running of the United Nations, key decisions are now “frequently made without a genuine

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ PAUL VI, Speech to the United Nations Organization on its 20th Anniversary, 4 October 1965.

⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, General Audience, 6 April 2022.

⁹ Cf. FRANCIS, Address to the UN General Assembly, 25 September 2015.

¹⁰ https://www.un.org/en/ga/revitalization/revital_bkg.shtml

¹¹ Cf. FRANCIS, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 10 January 2022.

¹² Cf. Ibid

process of negotiation in which all countries have a say.”¹³ This is at odds with the true nature of multilateral diplomacy, which “cherish[es] the differences and sensibilities that have historically marked various peoples.”¹⁴ The revitalization process must restore focus to those common aims outlined in the UN Charter: peace and security, human rights, and development. There remains much work to be done in this regard. Unfortunately, international cooperation is hindered by the flagrant imposition of contentious policies which do not enjoy agreement, particularly in the area of human rights. In this regard, there appears to be little desire on the part of specific States to recover the broad ground and humility that is necessary for consensus and authentic dialogue. Indeed, today it would appear that only the powerful and the well-funded prevail, reinventing human rights as they see fit and using them to reshape the world and the human person in their own image and ideas of radical autonomy. Instead, the fundamental human rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are not “niche” or competing, nor are they determined by the reactionary winds of mass media and culture. Human rights are rather firmly rooted in universal values, such that the right to life, to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression are not undermined, and that the institution of the family, which remains the original cell of social life¹⁵ and the “primordial school of humanity”¹⁶, is protected. Today, the Holy See reaffirms, once again, that human rights remain universal, objective and firmly rooted in the God given dignity of the human person.

It is imperative that broad agreement and genuine consensus be found again soon within this Organization if it is to restore its international credibility as a true family of nations. It must extend beyond the General Assembly, to the reform of those organs with “effective executive capability, such as the Security Council.”¹⁷ The landmark resolution, agreed by consensus in April of this year, requiring that the use of veto power be explained before the General Assembly, was a welcome step in this direction.¹⁸ The members of the Security Council, most especially the Permanent Members, hold a crucial responsibility for the maintenance of peace and order in the world. When there is no shared vision or political will for peaceful coexistence, and the very guardians of peace ignore the rules they claim to uphold, they become themselves the perpetrators of grave injustices. Driven by unbridled self-interest and determined by the logic of power, the system is heavily damaged and at risk. Only when the Representatives of nations gathered here are able to place the common good above their own partisan interests, will the legal framework of the United Nations’ System truly “be the pledge of a secure and happy future”.¹⁹

At present, however, that future remains elusive for a large part of the human family. Violence continues to scar our world; the devastation that war wreaks directly upon the populations of conflict zones is compounded by the indirect impact on countless

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cf. Universal Declaration of human Rights, which recognizes the family as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society” (Art. 16).

¹⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, Address at the Meeting with Families, Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, Santiago (Cuba), 22 September 2015.

¹⁷ Cf. FRANCIS, Address to the UN General Assembly, 25 September 2015.

¹⁸ Resolution A/77/L.52.

¹⁹ FRANCIS, Address to the UN Office at Nairobi, 26 November 2015.

other people far from the frontline. As Pope Francis has pointed out, “war diverts attention and resources, but these are the objectives that demand the utmost commitment: the fight against hunger, health, and education.”²⁰ World hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms are alarmingly on the rise. Figures reveal that the world is moving away from the target set to be reached by 2030.²¹ In fact, future projections indicate that around 8% of the world's population will still face food shortages. The number of people suffering hunger in the world has risen to as many as 828 million in 2021.

However, expenditure on arms, today at obscene levels, only serves to increase food insecurity, restrict access to healthcare - already in crisis on account of the COVID-19 pandemic - and deprive generations of their rightful education. It is time to bring an end to “armament hypocrisy” — speaking of peace and living off weapons.²² Instead of squandering vast sums on military equipment, it would be far wiser to invest in *avoiding* war, rather than *preparing* for it. In this regard, education should be a priority, for it “is in fact the primary vehicle of integral human development, for it makes individuals free and responsible.”²³ With COVID-19 having already disrupted the education of millions of students, there is urgent need for targeted investments to put ourselves back on track toward a brighter future.

Mr. President,

The war in Ukraine has exacerbated already concerning global trends, including rising food and fuel prices and increased displacement. The conflict has also brought renewed attention to nuclear security and the risk of nuclear escalation, an issue that has remained largely outside the public consciousness for decades.

Even before the war in Ukraine, drought and crop failure in various parts of the world had disrupted access to food for millions especially the world’s poorest, many of whom are unable to access or afford basic foodstuffs. With the onset of conflict, a key source of staple grains and cooking oil for countries that rely on food imports was interrupted, placing millions more at risk of food insecurity and starvation. Additionally, the war has also exposed the vulnerability of short-sighted energy policies that rely exclusively on a single source of fossil fuel, rather than developing clean and sustainable alternatives. As always in times of crisis, it is the poorest among us who suffer the most. As winter approaches in the northern hemisphere, many living in colder climates will face an existential choice between heating and eating. Addressing these crises—which can only be resolved fully once the violence in Ukraine ceases—requires urgent and concerted action.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine not only undermines the nuclear non-proliferation regime, but also presents us with the danger of nuclear devastation, either through escalation or accident. First, the spectacle of a nuclear-weapon State at war with a State that renounced its nuclear arsenal in exchange for security guarantees that have been blatantly disregarded will discourage other States that possess nuclear weapons

²⁰ FRANCIS, Angelus, 14 August 2022 – with reference to the threat of drought-induced famine in Somalia.

²¹ The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2022.

²² Cf. FRANCIS, Interview on return flight from Apostolic Journey to Thailand and Japan, 26 November 2019.

²³ FRANCIS, Message for the 2022 World Day of Peace, 3.

from following suit, complicating the path toward a world free of nuclear weapons. Second, any threat of nuclear weapons use is repugnant and merits unequivocal condemnation. Third, the Holy See has been following the situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant with deep concern and recalls that Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions prohibits attacks against nuclear electrical generating stations if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces that threaten civilian populations. To avoid a nuclear disaster, it is vital that there be serious engagement to find a peaceful outcome to the conflict. In this context, the regrettable lack of an outcome document at the 10th Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty comes as no surprise.

In the meantime, Europe's largest refugee crisis since the Second World War only adds to the millions throughout Africa, the Middle East, and Asia who have been forced to flee their country of origin because of conflict and war in search of a better future for themselves and their families. On top of this, many more are driven to leave their homes due to hunger, poverty and the effects of climate change. Mixed migration is a global phenomenon, which needs to be addressed accordingly. In this regard, implementing the vision and objectives of both the Global Compact for Safe, Regular, and Orderly Migration (GCM), as well as the Global Compact on Refugees, remain among the best ways to encourage the international cooperation and burden sharing. At the same time, States, with the help of the international community, must continue to fulfill their obligations to their citizens. This includes making every effort to generate the necessary conditions for people to live in peace, security and dignity in their countries of origin.

Today, the framework of international laws and agreements providing protection to refugees and upholding the human rights of migrants, regardless of status, is under significant strain. Mixed flows are notoriously difficult to manage. Without a sincere effort made to update the current international protection system, asylum system and the various legal instruments that govern Search and Rescue in this regard, the current chaos that continues to result in countless acts of violence, abuse and increasing loss of life will only get worse.

Mr. President,

The Holy See does not cease to follow with concern the Palestinian issue, and the conflict that it generates, and wishes to express its closeness to the Palestinian people for the suffering caused by the killing of the journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during the firefight between the Israeli army and some Palestinians on 11 May in Jenin (Palestine), which the journalist was simply documenting. The Holy See not only deplores in clear terms this and the other killings that have been on the increase in recent months, but it cannot fail to express its horror at what happened at the funeral of the deceased Shireen in Jerusalem, provoked by an unacceptable and absolutely reprehensible attitude on the part of the police: dignity and respect for a deceased person precedes any consideration of security, and those who fail in this cannot be in charge of public order.

In closely following the situation in Lebanon, the Holy See hopes that the country, even with the upcoming presidential elections, will continue on the path of rebirth while remaining faithful to its vocation of being a land of peace.

On the other hand, the Holy See welcomes that the parties to the conflict in Yemen have agreed to renew the truce brokered by the United Nations and it is hoped that this

sign of hope will be a definitive step towards ending the bloody conflict that has generated one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The Holy See hopes that the resumption of negotiations in Vienna on the Iran Nuclear Agreement in the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA - will ensure a safer and more fraternal world.

The Holy See follows with great concern the stalemate in Libya and the consequent security risks. The country continues to be divided internally by conflicting factions. This situation has an adverse impact on refugees and migrants, who are among the most vulnerable.

We continue to be concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian and the security situation in the Sahel region, which continues to be targeted by terrorist groups, and the expansion of this violence towards Western Africa, with attacks perpetrated in Benin and in Togo. The people across the region also are becoming more and more vulnerable due to increasing food insecurity, the multiplication of climate emergencies, as well as the pandemic.

The Holy See continue to be concerned about inter-community conflicts in the African continent, generated by different factors, and that run through many countries, often revealing a lack of efficiency of State structures in meeting the real needs of the population.

Among these, the Holy See follows with concern the violence and armed clashes in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which generate instability throughout the region, and the still tense situation in parts of Ethiopia, where the general humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate.

The Holy See continues to follow the political transitions currently underway in Sudan, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, with the hope that these will be brought to a speedy conclusion for the common good of all the citizens of the respective countries.

The precarious humanitarian condition in South Sudan is continually worsened due to flooding and food insecurity for a significant portion of the population, especially where children suffer malnutrition. The Holy See, while continuing to follow the situation on the youngest nation closely, continues to promote reconciliation through dialogue and social cooperation.

The Holy See is deeply concerned about the delicate situation in Nicaragua, which involves both people and institutions. It hopes that a path can be found towards respectful and peaceful coexistence.

The repeated episodes of violence in Haiti, which have aggravated the suffering of the population, already suffering because of its precarious economic and social conditions remain of great concern to the Holy See.

The Holy See, saddened by the recent fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia, urged the parties to respect the ceasefire in view of a peace agreement.

On a more positive note, the Holy See welcomes the results announced regarding the hoped-for production of a vaccine against malaria, which is the main cause of death in Africa. This merits a joint effort to make it accessible to all in need.

Mr. President,

Our common home continues to be gravely affected by the adverse impacts of climate change. Indeed, we have grown so used to hearing of extreme weather events, including flooding, drought and wildfires, that we may be left in a state of “globalized indifference”.²⁴ And yet those phenomena are clear signs of our failure to address climate change, notwithstanding the overwhelming scientific evidence. Moreover, multilateral environmental agreements have already laid out obligations for States Parties that would prove effective in tackling the threat posed by climate change. It is now up to each State Party to honor the obligations incumbent upon them and to implement such agreements. In this regard, when the international community gathers at COP27²⁵ in Sharm El Sheikh it is to be hoped that there will be the political will to take more decisive and transformative decisions to protect the environment by accelerating global climate action through stronger mitigation measures, scaled-up adaptation efforts and enhanced flows of appropriate finance. On this issue, I am pleased to note that the Holy See, acting in the name and on behalf of the Vatican City State, has recently deposited the instruments of accession both to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to the Paris Agreement, and will thus become a party to both prior to COP27. With this step, the Holy See affirms its intention to contribute to the efforts of all States to work together in solidarity, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, to respond effectively to challenges posed by climate change.

The digital environment also demands greater attention, given the increasingly important role that information and communication technologies (ICTs) play in our daily lives. While recognizing the new opportunities for intercultural exchange, learning, and innovation created by ICTs, we should also be aware of the digital gaps between and within countries, particularly developing countries. Digital connectivity cannot be achieved without addressing poverty and underdevelopment. Additionally, the growth in the use of ICTs brings new risks, as bad actors find new ways to misuse these technologies for criminal purposes. As Pope Francis points out, “the potential of digital technology is enormous, yet the possible negative impact of its abuse in the area of human trafficking, the planning of terrorist activities, the spread of hatred and extremism, the manipulation of information and [...] in the area of child abuse, is equally significant. Public opinion and lawmakers are finally coming to realize this.”²⁶ In this regard, the Holy See continues to be engaged constructively in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of ICTs for Criminal Purposes to address transnational crime.

Recognizing that interlocking challenges require a unified response, Pope Francis reminds us that “today more than ever, everything is deeply connected and that the safeguarding of the environment cannot be divorced from ensuring justice for the poor

²⁴ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, 30.

²⁵ 27th Session of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC.

²⁶ FRANCIS, Address to participants in the Congress on Child Dignity in the Digital World, 14 November 2019.

and finding answers to the structural problems of the global economy.”²⁷ This is at the heart of his call for a different and responsible economic practice, recognizing that authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, man, woman, girl, boy, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and “take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system.’ Accordingly, our human ability to transform reality must proceed in line with God’s original gift of all that is.”²⁸

Mr. President,

At this watershed moment, our quest for solutions must start with a reaffirmation of the inalienable dignity that unites us. It underpins all that we are and do, enabling us to speak of our belonging to the one human family. A recognition of this reality is the first, vital step we need to take to begin transforming any crisis into a new opportunity.

This is the logic of the appeal Pope Francis addressed to the Heads of Nations and international organizations calling on them to work together for peace, “not a peace based on the balance of weapons, [or] on mutual fear,”²⁹ but rather one born of encounter and dialogue. For this, “it is necessary to pass from the strategies of political, economic and military power to a plan for global peace: *no* to a world divided among conflicting powers; *yes* to a world united among peoples and civilizations that respect each other.”³⁰

That is the truly transformative solution that together we are called to make reality in and through this Organization.

Thank you, Mr. President.

²⁷ FRANCIS, Letter for the event “Economy of Francesco”, Assisi, 26-28 March 2020.

²⁸ FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, 5.

²⁹ FRANCIS, Angelus, 3 July 2022.

³⁰ *Ibid.*