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MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NATIONAL STATEMENT
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President –

We created this institution recognising that while our interests as countries may differ, we have shared purpose as people.

Because we can only solve our biggest problems together.

Because we determined after the last world war to prevent it ever being repeated.

Because all of us can see the world as it is – and by listening to each other and by acting together, all of us can choose to shape it for the better.

Australia is home to people from all nations of the world.

And we draw on the knowledge of First Peoples carrying forward the oldest continuing culture on earth.

We know that at this time, when its success has never been needed by more of the world's peoples, this institution and our shared multilateral system is falling short of the commitments we have made together.

And we are collectively falling further behind.

There are more people displaced, and more people hungry.

There is more conflict, and greater risk that a nuclear weapon could be used.

The climate is changing faster than our combined efforts to stop it.

Already, African agricultural productivity has dropped by a third.

Within just 22 general assemblies from now, more than 900 million additional people in sub-Saharan Africa will have less water than they need.

In many countries - including my own - floods or fires have overwhelmed communities.

The most tourism-dependent region in the world, the Caribbean, faces the loss of half its tourism revenue because of extreme weather.

Nowhere is the climate threat more profound than in the Pacific.

Kiribati, Tuvalu and Marshall Islands are only a few metres above sea level.

The first article of the UN Charter speaks to maintaining peace and security, but there can be no security if the sea itself closes in.

This is why the voices and experiences of the Pacific matter.

Australia, as a member of the Pacific Islands Forum, believes in Pacific sovereignty and solidarity.

The connections between the First Peoples of our lands and waters and the peoples of the Blue Pacific stretch back through time.

We share the Pacific Ocean, custodians of one fifth of the earth's surface.

We understand our duty to amplify the collective Pacific voice, and to act.

We are determined to make Australia a renewable energy superpower.

Within this decade, 82% of Australia's electricity generation will be renewable – a huge transformation from the 32% when our government came to office last year.

Australia is supporting the region's transition to renewable energy, helping countries build climate resilience and access our increased climate finance contributions.

Like in Palau where up to a fifth of the country's energy needs will be provided by new solar and battery storage through our Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific.

And Australia is sharing our innovations in climate adaptation in the Pacific and beyond.

We are supporting improved food security in some of the most vulnerable communities in the world, including with irrigation technology that has improved crop yields and reduced water usage by 30% for farmers in countries including Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Climate is far from the only crisis the world faces.

The COVID-19 pandemic propelled 124 million people back into poverty, and humanitarian needs are burgeoning.

Australia is part of the global response.

In the last twelve months we provided humanitarian assistance for more than twenty crises where the UN requested international support.

These crises are making it harder to achieve our 17 shared Sustainable Development Goals, but they're not the only reason we are falling short.

And many developing countries are rightly frustrated.

Through the 2030 Agenda, the world committed to "a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future."

At the half-way point, we have seen stagnation or regression in nearly a third of the targets, and we are not on track to meet any of them.

But we ought not be tempted to abandon some goals so that we might concentrate on others.

The great wisdom of the 2030 Agenda is in recognising the connection between different aspects of social and economic development, and environmental protection – and how together they enable prosperity and peace.

We all invested years in negotiating this Agenda. It provides an irreplaceable normative framework for collective global action.

All member states must protect it and deliver on what we have agreed.

All UN officials, from the Secretary-General down, must guard against dilution.

Because the approaching climate tipping point means we simply cannot afford ongoing unsustainable development.

Nor will we ever maximise our development while leaving people behind.

Or if we pick and choose between universally agreed human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The drafters of the Universal Declaration...

People like Bertha Lutz of Brazil...

P.C Chang of China...

Minerva Bernardino of the Dominican Republic...

H.J Mehta of India...

Eleanor Roosevelt of the United States...

And Jessie Street of Australia...

All were seized of this simple fact: human rights apply equally to all people, no matter who you happen to be or where you happen to be born.

This was a global charter for the whole human family across east to west, north to south.

That was 75 years ago. And reaffirmed thirty years ago in the Vienna Declaration.

Yet today around 2.4 billion women of working age do not have equal opportunities, when we know that if we closed the gender gap in economic participation we would add at least twelve trillion US dollars a year to global GDP.

In other words, generating three times more than the cost of fully achieving the SDGs.

But to deliver the SDGs we must address systemic shortcomings and funding needs.

Small Island Developing States, including Cabo Verde and Samoa, have advocated for reforms to international development financing, to reflect the reality that income per capita is an imperfect predictor of development need.

The tragic fact is that development gains can be quickly reversed by shocks like extreme weather events.

We still need income measures such as GNI, but we also need to listen to what many countries are saying about other growing vulnerabilities they face, especially as a result of climate change.

So Australia commends the work of the High-level Multidimensional Vulnerability Index panel, led by the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda and former Prime Minister of Norway.

This is but one tool that can be used to improve what the international development financing architecture delivers for the most vulnerable countries in the world.

The world needs more from international financial institutions, especially the multilateral development banks.

Their institutional capacity, their direct contributions and the multiplier effect of those contributions could be propelling the world much closer to realising our shared development goals.

As the G20 Independent Experts Group has highlighted, to transform development, the MDBs will have to transform themselves – and the window for action is closing fast.

Australia welcomes the leadership of the Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, and we are looking at how we can partner on the Bridgetown Initiative.

With 22 of our 26 nearest neighbours being developing countries, we want to contribute to a region where all our countries and peoples can thrive.

So we have instituted a new development policy and rebuilt our ODA program – with nearly 1.7 billion additional Australian dollars over five years, and providing for ongoing growth over the long term.

And we have rechannelled three billion US dollars of our IMF Special Drawing Rights allocation to support vulnerable countries.

Today I call on all developed countries to increase their rechanneling of Special Drawing Rights to boost concessional long-term investment, critical to resilience building and disaster response.

Australia also recognises that the multilateral development banks and bilateral donors need to do more to harness the capital, innovation and energy of the private sector.

Last month, we launched Australian Development Investments, a 250 million Australian dollar impact investment fund to do just that.

We have launched *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040...*

Responding to calls from our regional partners for Australia to play a bigger role in their pursuit of economic opportunity, development and growth – which will support our shared security and prosperity.

All our efforts aim to help countries build their own resilience and sovereignty...

To ensure countries aren't held back by unsustainable debt.

Australia's investments are a statement of our belief that social and economic progress are preconditions for peace.

Just as peace is a precondition for progress.

Peace is not a gift and it is never a given.

It calls us to play our part in diplomatic reassurance, economic development and military deterrence.

All acting to play our part in keeping and building peace.

Australia has always pursued a world where differences and disputes are settled through institutions, agreed rules and norms, and not by power and size.

We have been active in the UN's peacebuilding agenda since its inception, focused on addressing the underlying factors that contribute to conflict.

We are proud of our peacebuilding reform work with Angola in leading negotiations for parallel Security Council and General Assembly resolutions that shaped the Sustaining Peace Agenda.

We look forward to 2025 when Australia will have a seat on the UN Peacebuilding Commission, coinciding with the review point for those resolutions.

Since the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Fund, we have been a consistent partner, and we are a top ten donor.

Our commitment to international peace and security is reflected in our history of involvement in peacekeeping – some 62 operations over more than 75 years.

We remain the eleventh largest financial contributor to the overall UN Peacekeeping Budget, in addition to operational support and regional troop training.

We support a strong role for regional leadership on peacekeeping.

We welcome Fiji's proposal to establish a new Pacific Peacekeeping Network to strengthen our region's capacity and cooperation.

Just as we welcome the call from African states for UN assessed contributions for African Union-led peace support operations.

Our commitment to international peace and security is why Australia seeks a seat on the Security Council for 2029-2030.

And it is why we pursue Security Council reform.

We must ensure greater permanent and non-permanent representation for Africa, Latin America and Asia, including permanent seats for India and Japan.

And we must demand more of the permanent members, including constraints on the use of the veto.

With its special responsibility as a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia mocks the UN every day it continues its illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine.

Just as Russia mocks the international community with its cynical games on food security that leave millions hungry; promising grain to vulnerable nations yet at the same time destroying Ukrainian grain silos along the Black Sea Coast.

The rest of the permanent members and all member states must be unyielding in our response to Russia's grave violation of Article II of our shared UN Charter.

If we waver in our response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we would be validating the most fundamental of breaches of international law...

Who might be the next victim of state-based aggression?

But President, even with all the conflicts on the UN agenda...

Even as we face the existential threat of climate change...

The world faces another existential threat...

One risk that is consequential for every member state of these United Nations...

And that is the risk of conflict between great powers.

This great assembly of nations knows that strategic competition is not new. Through the course of history, it has played out across the globe.

Often small countries, vast distances from major powers, have borne the brunt of a race for dominance, with legacies of those contests casting shadows across the generations.

But the modern arms race forever transformed the scale of great power competition, and pushed all of humanity to the brink of Armageddon.

In 1962, one of those close calls spurred the construction of conflict prevention infrastructure between the US and the Soviet Union: guardrails that responsibly managed Cold War competition and kept it from careering into conflict.

Today's circumstances mean we need to commit anew to building such preventive infrastructure to reduce the risk of crisis, conflict and war by accident.

The Indo-Pacific is home to unprecedented military build-up, yet transparency and strategic reassurance are lacking.

Tension is rising between states with overlapping claims in the South China Sea, and disputed features have been militarised.

And North Korea continues to destabilise with its ongoing nuclear weapons program and ballistic missile launches, threatening Japan, the Republic of Korea and the broader region.

When you add dangerous encounters in the air and at sea, including between nuclear powers, we are faced with a combination of factors that give rise to the most confronting circumstances in decades.

In short, military power is expanding, but measures to constrain military conflict are not – and there are few concrete mechanisms for averting it.

So it is up to all of us to act to deploy our collective statecraft, our influence, our networks, our capabilities, to minimise the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation...

To prevent catastrophic conflict.

Peacebuilding today must rise to this challenge.

This is why Australia is contributing to a strategic equilibrium.

Helping to maintain the conditions for peace through our diplomacy - while playing our part in transparent, collective deterrence of aggression.

We seek to ensure that no state concludes that the benefits of conflict outweigh the risks.

And we seek new measures for conflict prevention that reinforce the region's existing economic and security architecture.

President, the desire for peace is seen across our region.

ASEAN is determined to develop practical ways to implement the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and play a leading role in promoting peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region.

Australia supports their aim.

ASEAN is right to affirm that disputes must be resolved peacefully, in accordance with international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Consistent with this architecture and the need to address the growing risk of conflict, Australia welcomes President Widodo's statement as Chairman of the East Asia Summit, noting that the recent leaders' meeting:

“reaffirmed the need for all EAS participating countries to promote open channels of communication to reduce risks of misunderstanding and miscalculation and prevent conflict in our region.”

New measures to prevent great power conflict are an Australian priority, and we hope they are a priority shared by Member States throughout this General Assembly.

Strategic trust is clearly in short supply.

We would be wise to encourage modest steps, focused on mutual strategic reassurance, military risk reduction measures and on opening lines of communication at all levels.

Communication should never be withheld as a punishment or offered as a reward.

Given how conflict could be sparked, there would be benefit in pursuing clearer arrangements among maritime countries – all maritime countries equally – to prevent unsafe actions at sea.

And given that it is nuclear weapons that most risk catastrophe, we must work harder to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

Our Government is renewing Australia's enduring commitment to a world without nuclear weapons.

We will continue to work with others to strengthen the NPT – the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime – despite those who seek to damage it for their own gains.

This week Australia joined Japan and the Philippines to urge progress on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

This would address a critical gap in our disarmament architecture, by stopping the production of material needed to create nuclear weapons.

Australia is also working with the IAEA to ensure the peaceful use of technology and combat proliferation and nuclear security risks.

President -

Australia wants a world where no country dominates, and no country is dominated.

We want a world where we achieve our shared Sustainable Development Goals, for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

We also see how all of this could be destroyed by crisis, conflict and war.

Which path we choose is up to all of us.

It is up to all of us to have the humility to listen. It's up to all of us to act – and act urgently – on what we hear.

We must recognise that many developing countries are inadequately served by too much of the international system - a system which must be reformed as a matter of urgency.

We must take these steps because we need everyone to know they have a stake in the success of these United Nations – our United Nations.

All countries must have a stake in the UN Charter and exercise their agency to uphold it.

Because in today's world, there is no zero-sum game.

There can never be just one winner.

In this age of existential threats, there is either a shared future or no future.

We can only choose between shared failure, or shared success.

Let us all choose success.