

Speech by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the opening of the 78th UN General Assembly

Speech read by the President of the Republic, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, at the opening of the 78th United Nations General Assembly, at the UN headquarters in New York (USA), on September 19, 2023

My greetings to the President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Dennis Francis of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is a pleasure to be preceded by the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres.

I greet each of the Heads of State and Government and delegates present.

I pay homage to our compatriot Sérgio Vieira de Mello and 21 other employees of this Organization, victims of the brutal attack in Baghdad, 20 years ago.

I also wish to express my condolences to the victims of the earthquake in Morocco and the storms that hit Libya.

Like what happened recently in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in my country. These tragedies have claimed lives and caused irreparable losses.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all the victims and their families.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Exactly twenty years ago I stood on this rostrum for the first time.

And said, on that September 23, 2003:

"May my first words before this World Parliament be of confidence in the human capacity to overcome challenges and evolve towards superior forms of coexistence"

I return today to say that I maintain my unshakable trust in humanity.

At that time, the world had not yet realized the severity of the climate crisis. Today, it knocks on our doors, destroys our homes, our cities, our countries, kills and imposes losses and suffering on our brothers, especially the poorest.

Hunger, the central theme of my speech at this World Parliament 20 years ago, today affects 735 million human beings, who go to sleep tonight without knowing if they will have anything to eat tomorrow.

The world is increasingly unequal.

The 10 richest billionaires have more wealth than the poorest 40% of humanity.

The destiny of every child born on this planet seems to be decided while they are still in their mother's womb. The part of the world where their parents live and the social class their family belongs to will determine whether or not that child will have opportunities throughout life.

Whether they will eat at every meal, or whether they will be denied the right to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner every day.

Whether they will have access to healthcare, or whether they will fall to diseases that could have already been eradicated.

Whether they will finish school and get a quality job, or whether they will become part of the countless of unemployed, underemployed and discouraged people.

First of all, we must overcome resignation, which makes us accept such unfairness as a natural phenomenon.

There is a lack of political will from those who govern the world, in order to overcome inequality.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

If today I return in the honourable capacity of president of Brazil, it is thanks to the victory won by democracy in my country.

Democracy ensured that we overcame hate, misinformation and oppression.

Hope, once again, has won over fear.

Our mission is to unite Brazil, and rebuild a sovereign, fair, sustainable, supportive, generous and joyful country.

Brazil is finding itself again within itself, with our region, with the world and with multilateralism.

As I never tire of repeating, Brazil is back.

Our country is back to make its due contribution in facing the major global challenges.

We have reclaimed our foreign policy's universalism, marked by respectful dialogue with everyone.

The international community is immersed in a whirlwind of multiple and simultaneous crises.

The Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and food and energy insecurity have been amplified by growing geopolitical tensions.

Racism, intolerance and xenophobia have spread, encouraged by new technologies created supposedly to bring us closer together.

If we had to summarize these challenges in a single word, it would be inequality.

Inequality is at the root of these phenomena or acts to aggravate them.

The UN's broadest and most ambitious collective action aimed at development – the 2030 Agenda – could turn into its biggest failure.

We have reached half of the implementation period and are still far from the defined goals.

Most sustainable development goals are moving at a slow pace.

The moral and political importance of eradicating poverty and ending hunger appears to have been numbed.

In these seven years we have left, reducing inequalities within and between countries should become the core objective of the 2030 Agenda.

Reducing inequalities within countries requires including the poor in government budgets and making the rich pay taxes proportional to their wealth.

In Brazil, we are committed to implementing all 17 SDGs in an integrated and indivisible manner.

We want to achieve racial equality in Brazilian society through an eighteenth goal, which we will voluntarily adopt.

We launched the Brazil Zero Hunger plan, which will bring together a series of initiatives to reduce poverty and food insecurity.

Among them is the Bolsa Família (Family Stipend), which has become a global reference in income transfer programmes for families that keep their children vaccinated

and in school.

Inspired by Brazilian Bertha Lutz, a pioneer as an advocate in gender equality in the UN Charter, we have passed a bill that makes equal pay between women and men mandatory when they perform the same role.

We shall fight femicide and all forms of violence against women.

We shall rigorously advocate for the rights of LGBTQI+ groups and of people with disabilities.

We have revived social participatory practices as a strategic tool for implementing public policies.

Mr. President,

Acting against climate change involves thinking about tomorrow and facing historical inequalities.

Rich countries grew based on a model with high rates of climate-damaging gas emissions.

The climate emergency makes it urgent to correct course and implement what has already been agreed.

There is no other reason why we speak of common, but differentiated responsibilities. It is the vulnerable populations in the Global South who are most affected by the loss and damage caused by climate change.

The richest 10% of the world's population are responsible for almost half of all carbon released into the atmosphere.

We, developing countries, do not want to repeat this model.

In Brazil, we have already proven once and will prove again that a socially fair and environmentally sustainable model is possible.

We are at the forefront of energy transition, and our matrix is already one of the cleanest in the world.

87% of our electrical power comes from clean and renewable sources.

Solar, wind, biomass, ethanol and biodiesel power generation is growing every year.

The potential for generating green hydrogen is immense.

With the Ecological Transformation Plan, we will invest in sustainable industrialization and infrastructure.

We have resumed a sound and renewed Amazon agenda, with oversight actions aimed at fighting environmental crimes.

Over the last 8 months, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has already been reduced by 48%.

The whole world has always talked about the Amazon. Now, the Amazon is speaking for itself.

A month ago, we hosted the Belém Summit, at the heart of the Amazon and launched a new collaboration agenda between countries that are part of that biome.

There are 50 million South Americans in the Amazon, whose future depends on the decisive and coordinated action of the countries that hold sovereignty over the region's territories.

We have also furthered dialogue with other countries that have tropical forests in Africa and Asia.

We want to arrive at COP 28 in Dubai with a joint vision that reflects, without any coaching, the priorities for preserving the Amazon, Congo and Borneo-Mekong basins

based on our needs.

Without mobilizing financial and technological resources, there is no way to implement what we decided in the Paris Agreement and the Global Biodiversity Framework.

The promise to allocate 100 billion dollars – annually – to developing countries remains just that, a promise.

Today, this amount would be insufficient for a demand that already reaches trillions of dollars.

Mr. President,

The principle on which multi-lateralism is based – that of sovereign equality between nations – has been eroding.

At the main global governance levels, negotiations in which all countries have a voice and vote have lost momentum.

When institutions reproduce inequalities, they are part of the problem, not the solution.

Last year, the IMF made available \$160 billion in special drawing rights to European countries, and just \$34 billion to African countries.

Almost all income generated by African countries has to be used to service foreign debt.

The unequal and distorted representation in the management of the IMF and the World Bank is unacceptable.

We have not corrected the excesses of market deregulation and the support of the minimum State.

The foundations of a new economic governance have not been laid.

The BRICS was the result of this paralysis and constitutes a strategic platform to promote cooperation between emerging countries.

The recent expansion of the group at the Johannesburg Summit strengthens the fight for a order, which accommodates the economic, geographic and political plurality of the 21st century.

We are a force that works towards fairer global trade in a context of a serious crisis in multilateralism.

Rich countries' protectionism has gained strength and the World Trade Organization remains paralysed, especially its dispute settlement system.

Nobody remembers the Doha Development Round any more.

In the meantime, unemployment and precarious work has been undermining people's confidence in better times, especially young people.

Governments need to break away from with the increasing dissonance between the “voice of the markets” and the “voice of the streets”.

Neoliberalism has aggravated the economic and political inequality that plagues democracies today.

Its legacy is a mass of disfranchised and excluded people.

Amidst the wreck, far-right adventurers emerge, who deny politics and sell solutions that are as easy as they are wrong.

Many have fallen to the temptation of replacing failed neoliberalism with primitive, conservative and authoritarian nationalism.

We repudiate an agenda that uses immigrants as scapegoats, undermines the welfare state and attacks workers' rights.

We need to reclaim the best humanist traditions, which inspired the creation of the UN.

No relevant economic or social achievement in Brazil came to fruition without the

decisive support of the State.

Active inclusion policies at cultural, educational and digital levels are fundamental for promoting democratic values and defending the Rule of Law.

Preserving press freedom is essential.

A journalist, like Julian Assange, cannot be punished informing society in a transparent and legitimate way.

Our fight is against misinformation and cybercrimes.

Apps and platforms should not abolish the labour laws we fought so hard for.

Upon taking over as the chair of the G20 next December, we will spare no effort to place the fight against inequalities, in all its dimensions, at the core of the international agenda.

Under the motto "Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet", the Brazilian chair will coordinate social inclusion and fight against hunger; sustainable development and reform of global governance institutions.

Mr. President,

There will be no sustainability or prosperity without peace.

Armed conflicts are an offense to human rationality.

We know the horrors and suffering produced by all wars.

Promoting a culture of peace is a duty for us all. Building it requires persistence and vigilance.

It is disturbing to see that old unresolved disputes persist and new threats emerge or gain force.

The difficulty of guaranteeing the creation of a State for the Palestinian people clearly shows this.

Added to this case, the persevering humanitarian crisis in Haiti, the conflict in Yemen, threats to Libyan national unity and institutional ruptures in Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Niger and Sudan.

In Guatemala, there is a risk of a coup, which would prevent the winner of the democratic elections from taking office.

The war in the Ukraine exposes our collective inability to enforce the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

We do not underestimate the difficulties in achieving peace.

But no solution will be lasting if it is not based on dialogue.

I have reiterated that work needs to be done to create space for negotiations.

A lot is invested in weapons and little in development.

Last year, military spending totalled over 2 trillion dollars.

Expenditure on nuclear weapons reached 83 billion dollars, a value twenty times higher than the regular UN budget.

Stability and security will not be achieved where there is social exclusion and inequality.

The UN was born to be the home of understanding and dialogue.

The international community must choose.

On one hand, there is the expansion of conflicts, the furthering of inequalities and the erosion of the Rule of Law.

On the other, the renewing of multilateral institutions dedicated to promoting peace.

Unilateral sanctions cause great harm to the population of affected countries.

In addition to not achieving their alleged goals, they hinder the mediation and prevention

processes, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Brazil will continue to reject measures taken without support from the UN Charter, such as the economic and financial embargo imposed on Cuba and the attempt to classify this country as a state sponsor of terrorism.

We shall continue to criticise any attempts to divide the world into zones of influence and of reviving the Cold War.

The UN Security Council has been progressively losing its credibility.

This frailty is the specific result of actions from its permanent members, who wage unauthorized wars aimed at territorial expansion or regime change.

Its paralysis is the most eloquent proof of the urgent need to reform it, endowing it with greater representation and effectiveness.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Inequality needs to inspire outrage.

Outrage over hunger, poverty, war, disrespect for human beings.

Moved by the power of outrage, we may act willingly and unwavering in fighting inequality and effectively transforming the world around us.

The UN needs to fulfil its role as a builder of a world with more solidarity, fraternity and fairness.

But it will only do so if its members have the courage to proclaim their discontent at inequality and work tirelessly to overcome it.

Thank you.

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