

**PRESIDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ADDRESS TO THE 78<sup>TH</sup> SESSION GENERAL  
DEBATE OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

20 September 2023

Mr President,

Mr Secretary-General,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellencies,

Esteemed delegates,

I would like my opening words to be an expression of the Spanish people's solidarity with the victims of the earthquake in Morocco and of the flooding in Libya. Spain stands, and will continue to stand, with these two countries to mitigate the consequences of these terrible tragedies in every way possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of this same month, a young Spanish aid worker lost her life in the Bakhmut region of Ukraine. The vehicle in which she was travelling was hit by artillery fire, killing another aid worker and seriously injuring two more.

All four shared the same passion, a vocation that dignifies all humanity and transcends borders: a passion for helping those in need.

That was not the only thing they had in common. More than anything it was their activism that brought them together, their work taking food and supplies to civilians, providing medical assistance, evacuating casualties.

Their example demands of us a calm but nonetheless urgent reflection on the need to take a stand against injustice and not stay silent when human rights and the most basic rules that govern our nations' peaceful co-existence are being violated.

This assembly has been witness to many memorable speeches delivered by such leaders as Salvador Allende, Olof Palme and Nelson Mandela.

We should, of course, draw inspiration from their words.

But, given the urgency of the challenges we are facing, it is not enough for us to revel in their eloquence: it is time to turn words into deeds, because time is, quite simply, running out.

We have some difficult choices ahead of us: change, or let ourselves be swept away by the course of events. Progress, or retreat. Working together, or looking out for ourselves. Building a future, or reviving the past. Contenting ourselves with words, or moving on to action.

The first difficult choices I am going to talk about relate to the **climate emergency**.

We have just experienced, in quick succession, the hottest months since records began. And extreme weather events are becoming more and more frequent, with devastating effects on every continent.

According to the experts, we are now in uncharted territory. It is no longer a case of trying to stop temperatures from rising, but of mitigating and, as far as possible, adapting to a situation that is already here.

Thanks to science, we know that we cannot let temperatures increase by more than 1.5 degrees, that under no circumstances can global emissions peak any later than 2025, and that we have no other choice than to speed up the roll-out of renewable energies, in a fair and equitable manner, to triple their generation capacity by the end of this decade.

In doing this, we also need to show solidarity with the most vulnerable countries, driving forward the adaptation agenda and putting the loss and damage agreement reached last year in Sharm el-Sheikh into practice.

Fighting the climate emergency requires courage and determination. We need to bring about an unprecedented technological and economic revolution, something that will only be possible with wide-scale, resolute support from global society. To win this support we need to be intelligent in our approach to climate inaction's main ally, denialism. This will be achievable as long as we are able to transform this formidable challenge into an opportunity to create more and better jobs, to make all of our industries more sustainable and, in short, to keep moving forward, following science every step of the way.

On this path, Spain's actions speak louder than its words.

We have set more ambitious renewable energy and energy efficiency targets in our National Energy and Climate Plan.

We are going to be contributing €225 million to the Green Climate Fund, €20 million to the Adaptation Fund and over €17 million to instruments aimed at strengthening climate justice, particularly the funds for the most vulnerable countries and the loss and damage funds.

Just today I signed the Treaty of the High Seas on Spain's behalf. Building on the historic Kunming-Montreal Agreement, this new treaty represents another step forward in protecting the balance of nature.

It is crucial that we make a resounding success of COP28 in the United Arab Emirates. Spain is fully committed to achieving this.

**The second area in which we have difficult decisions to make is the defence of democracy, fundamental rights, equality and social justice.**

We are witnessing a profound crisis of apathy and mistrust of institutions. A wave of extremism and reactionary thinking that is rising all over the world, propelled by movements that all share the same strategy: promising a return to a mythical past that never existed in the first place. Marginalizing and criminalizing disadvantaged minorities. Rejecting equality and feminism. And questioning human, civil and social rights.

These movements are bringing back ideas that we thought had long been abandoned, and they are flourishing in those places where social discontent is highest.

It is not easy to combat a movement that has chosen lies, fear and manipulation as its main weapons, but we can draw hope from the determination shown by many societies to uphold the legacy of growth and progress and their refusal to move in any other direction than forwards.

This is the path marked out by civil society in Spain, which has taken a bold, determined stance. This is particularly the case when it comes to equality between women and men, as recent events in the world of sport have shown. Spain has decided that 'enough is enough', with all the consequences that this decision entails. Because every step forward a woman takes is a step forward for us all – men and women alike.

There is a long way to go and there are many battles to be waged if we are to achieve full equality. None of them is more pressing than the need, once and for all, to eradicate male violence against women, a scourge whose existence is, against all logic, still brazenly questioned by some.

There is no better antidote to reactionary extremism than feminism. It is undoubtedly the flagship cause of our century – the century of women.

This commitment to gender equality also needs to be reflected in multilateral relations and, more specifically, in the allocation of top jobs at the institutions themselves. It is therefore important that this consideration be taken into account in the next appointments made in the United Nations system, including this General Assembly.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In these tumultuous years we have seen a growing threat looming over democracy in many places around the world. We witnessed it in Washington D.C. and Brasilia, and are now seeing it in Niger and Gabon.

We have, unfortunately, learned not to take for granted that the rights and freedoms for which past generations fought so valiantly will be there forever.

The 26 July coup in Niger has serious implications. Together with Mauritania, Niger was one of the only countries in the Sahel with a democratically elected government. Weakened by years of decline, the region risks becoming a series of failed states, and this instability could spread to neighbouring regions such as the Gulf of Guinea, already suffering at the hands of terrorists.

It is crucial that we find a peaceful way out without resorting to military force. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the mediation efforts of the Economic Community of West African States.

Spain has always been a committed partner in the process of strengthening democracy, not only in the context of fair elections, the very essence of the principle of democracy, but also in terms of the entire institutional mechanism that makes it possible for people to enjoy full use of their fundamental rights, particularly as regards wealth distribution and development.

In this area, we are working closely with our Latin American partners, with whom we share values and networks, to strengthen alliances and pool our experiences.

One good example is the transitional justice work being done in Colombia on the way towards full peace. It is a laudable achievement, and Spain intends to continue giving support wherever it is needed in order to bring the ongoing peace talks to a conclusion. The constitutional reform in Chile is another example of a bold commitment to institutional reform, and Chile, too, can count

on our full support in this endeavour. Spain also reiterates its commitment to seeing democracy return to Venezuela, so that the Venezuelan people can once again look forward to an opportunity-filled future.

**The third and final challenge I would like to bring up is the defence of multilateralism and a rule-based international order.**

The United Nations System is the embodiment of a determination to work together to find global solutions to our shared challenges and resolve differences through diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation.

We are now faced with the challenge of demonstrating that the system works for everybody. Otherwise, inequality will provide fertile ground in which seeds of discourse can be planted by the enemies of multilateralism.

It is crucial that we step up to defend the 2030 Agenda. We need to stand up, with all the courage of our convictions, to those who use lies and manipulation to cast doubt upon this enormous collective effort. We must take the Summit held these past days as an opportunity to renew our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Unfortunately, we are not making good progress towards the 17 SDGs. If we continue down this path, in 2030, 575 million people will still be living in extreme poverty and 84 million children will still not be attending school. And, at this rate, we will need another 300 years to close the gender gap.

This failure is morally unacceptable.

I repeat: now is not the time for words, but for deeds.

We need to commit to spending more on official development assistance. Spain has just passed a new Cooperation Act, pledging to allocate 0.7% of its gross national income to official development assistance by 2030. And we intend to continue to prioritize key issues, contributing €120 million to the SDG Fund and another €20 million to replenish the International Fund for Agricultural Development over the next 3 years.

But we cannot stop there. We need the right resources and tools if we are to advance towards sustainable development between now and 2030.

It will not be easy to mobilize the financing required to tackle the climate emergency and make the long-term investments that vulnerable countries need if they are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

But it has to happen, and with arrangements that reflect today's needs and realities. With the courage needed to stop thinking of sustainable development financing in billions of dollars and start measuring it in trillions.

Spain advocates strengthening existing mechanisms, making sure that countries can access the funding they need, whatever their income level.

But we are also in favour of reforming those mechanisms and of innovating by setting up new instruments. We need to maximize and optimize the financing capacity of multilateral development banks, and explore ways of making the international financial architecture more effective, inclusive, transparent and democratic.

We need to adapt international taxation to the world we live in today, and ensure that private investment is aligned with the SDGs.

The United Nations has to be the main setting for these conversations, as it is the only forum capable of bringing all countries' voices together on equal terms.

Spain wishes to make an active contribution to this pressing debate. Spain therefore aims to host the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025, with the hope that its impact will be truly transformative.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The harmonious co-existence of nations, lasting peace and the defence of international security are not just a pipedream. The preamble to the United Nations Charter can serve as our guide in pursuing this ambition, a commitment that links our generation with those to come.

Peace is the essential prerequisite for economic development and the expansion of human rights, a particularly significant topic this year, as we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration.

Many conflicts still rage around the world, and others have reached a deadlock. I would therefore like to reiterate the Spanish government's emphatic support for the work of the Secretary-General's Special Envoys for the Middle East Peace Process, Syria and Libya.

Regarding the Western Sahara, Spain supports a mutually acceptable political solution, within the framework of the United Nations Charters and the Security Council resolutions. The work of the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General is crucial in this respect, and has our full backing. We will continue to support the Saharawi population in camps, as we have always done, and carry on our role as Western Sahara's leading international donor of humanitarian aid.

On the other hand, on 31 December 2020 Spain and the United Kingdom concluded a bilateral agreement on Gibraltar in the context of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union.

Since then, we have worked tirelessly, aiming to have this understanding form the basis for Gibraltar's future relationship with the European Union. We trust that the EU and UK will soon be able to reach an agreement regarding the territory. This agreement will have to be entirely in line with the UN's policy on this matter, which has Spain's full backing, and with my country's legal position regarding sovereignty and jurisdiction in relation to Gibraltar. Our goal is the development of a prosperous social and economic area encompassing the whole of Gibraltar as well as the Campo de Gibraltar area on the Spanish side of the border.

At this point, and **with my country currently holding the EU Council Presidency**, I would like to share some thoughts on the **future of Europe**.

The European Union was born from a vow to bring peace to a continent that was devastated and traumatized following two world wars in barely three decades. From the ashes of destruction emerged a firm promise: never again will we go to war.

The memory of the tragedy we had experienced made us determined to work towards common prosperity, giving us the longest period of sustained peace in our continent's history.

In an attempt to undermine the irrefutable success of this unifying project, there are those who resort to caricatures, depicting the EU as a giant with feet of clay, incapable of defending itself with any real conviction.

Yet when faced with Russia's invasion of Ukraine – and contrary to Putin's expectations – Europe's response to the atrocities has been steadfast and united, making it clear that we are not going to sit back and let anyone attack the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter. I once again condemn Russia's unwarranted and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.

Indeed, as a show of our support to Ukraine, I launched our EU Presidency from Kyiv back on 1

July. Spain has been standing by Ukraine and will continue to do so for as long as it takes.

But we will also be playing an active role in working towards a fair and lasting peace that restores Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and gives the Ukrainian people the freedom to determine their own fate.

I believe in a Europe that spearheads the defence of global public goods and democracy, takes the lead in protecting its society and workers, and champions economic openness. A Europe that stands on the front line in the fight against inequality and in defending individual rights and public freedoms.

That Europe is already here, and it is moving resolutely forward thanks to two essential factors: a firm commitment to a collective agenda grounded in greater solidarity, fairness and inclusivity than the one which came out of the 2008 financial crisis; and the unanimity and decisiveness of its response to the critical events of these past four years.

This is the path down which the European ideal must continue to travel, whatever the challenges it faces along the way.

Europe needs to lead by example on the climate agenda, delivering on our pledge to reduce emissions, keeping our international climate financing promises, and speeding up the energy transition.

It needs to drive forward an exemplary policy on the global phenomenon of migration – a phenomenon which looks likely to become more intense and more tragic in the decades to come.

We need to control irregular immigration and provide routes for orderly, regular migration, which is – there is no doubt about it – something that Europe **does** need.

Being the exponent of a more person-centred and rights-oriented digital transformation on the global stage is another responsibility that falls upon the EU. We need to lay the groundwork for the regulation of artificial intelligence, a field whose vast possibilities do not outweigh the barely concealed risks.

Spain is committed to supporting the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, providing resources and know-how, in the development of multilateral governance in this area. We would like to host the headquarters of the future international artificial intelligence agency.



Europe needs to perform this role without shutting itself off from the rest of the world. Nothing would be more profoundly anti-European than an isolated EU. That is why we need to strengthen our transatlantic alliances with countries such as the US and Canada, as well as our Asian, African and Latin American partnerships.

Spain has always placed particular emphasis on boosting relations between the EU and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, with a new agenda that provides the framework for a strategic relationship with the region.

I am confident that the EU-CELAC summit will represent a real turning point and have a lasting impact.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the beginning of this speech I spoke of the brave woman who lost her life in Bakhmut while transporting humanitarian aid. Her name was Emma Igual. She was 32 years old.

Emma was the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor who lost most of her family during the Nazi era. She came to Spain from Austria and was adopted by a family from Barcelona.

The life of the grandmother, and the senseless killing of Emma, the granddaughter, were shaped by the kind of events which, in essence, led to the founding of this institution and give it meaning: a desire to preserve humanity from the scourge of war and to reaffirm our faith in the dignity and value of humanity.

If there is a place where Emma deserves to have her story told, it is, without a doubt, here before the United Nations General Assembly.

Let her example, and the example set every day by thousands of aid workers around the world, inspire us to take the difficult decisions required of us in these momentous times, to let our actions and achievements speak for themselves, and to turn our words into deeds.

Let this be the way in which we honour the memory of those who, just like Emma, gave everything they had to defend the values that inspire this noble organization.

Thank you very much.