

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA,
NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO,
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Ghana presents her compliments to you, Mr President, and extends congratulations on your election to preside over the sittings of the 78th session of the General Assembly.

I do not need to employ any hyperbole, nor find any fancy words to state the reality of the situation humanity currently faces. Our world is not a happy place today. Wherever we look, and in whichever area of our lives to which we turn our attention, there is unhappiness, distrust and loss of confidence in the structures that have guided the governance of the world since the end of the second world war, nearly eight (8) decades ago.

Mr President, the theme chosen for this meeting is **“Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all”**

The choice of the theme implies that there is general acknowledgement that things are not what they ought to be in our world. The mutual trust among nations that is required to ensure harmony has considerably diminished. The cohesion that we need to build the peace and prosperity of our societies is disintegrating, and nearing Cold War lows.

We do not seem to have any common values on which we can all agree, nor common goals to which we all aspire. The fault lines are not just between poor and rich, or the south and north, or the developed and developing worlds; even within well-established and rich countries, the tensions over trade, climate,

political boundaries and geopolitical spheres of influence are palpable. Long held definitions are being challenged, and sacred truths and beliefs are being questioned or discarded outright, and, in some instances, the deliberate peddling of blatant untruths has become acceptable.

This organisation, the United Nations, under whose auspices we, the nations of the world, are gathered for the annual review of the world, was established in the belief that our common humanity would be the overriding consideration in dealing with the problems that would, invariably, arise when we deal with one another.

There is no doubt that the organisation has achieved a great deal in its seventy-eight (78) years of existence, of which we can all be justifiably proud. But it is also true that the reluctance by the nations, that were the major powers at the formation of the organisation, to agree to any reform to reflect present realities has led to the undermining of the credibility of the United Nations and some of its organs, in particular the Security Council.

Ghana is currently serving out the second of its two-year term on the Security Council as a non-permanent member. This is the third time in the sixty-six (66) years since we joined the UN, the first post-colonial African nation to do so, that we have had the privilege of serving on the Council. Mr President, it has been a sad and disappointing experience for us.

We have witnessed, at first hand, over and over again, that the big powers of the United Nations might be preaching democracy, fairness and justice around the world, but are happy to practice the opposite here at the UN, prioritising parochial interests over those of humanity. Back in 2017, the first time I addressed the General Assembly as President of my country, I spoke at length on the need for reform of the United Nations and of the Security Council in particular.

I said, then, that the urgent need to reform this Organisation had been talked about and scheduled for a long time, but, somehow, we have never found the courage and the will to execute it. I said, then, that Ghana supports UN Reform, especially of the Security Council, as set out in Africa's Common Position on UN Reform, based on the Ezulwini Consensus.

Mr President, I said, then, that the time was long overdue to correct the longstanding injustice that the current structure and composition of the UN Security Council represent for the nations of Africa. After serving on the Council at this difficult time in the world, our views on the need for reform have been even more strongly re-asserted.

We cannot continue to preach democracy, equality and good governance around the globe; we cannot insist on peace and justice in the world, when our global organisation is seen by the majority of its members and the people of the world as hampered by an unjust and unfair structure.

Mr President, the Assembly has quite properly chosen the rebuilding of trust as critical in restoring stability and prosperity to our world. We cannot rebuild that trust when the organisation that should bind us is seen by many as helping to perpetuate an unfair world order, which is reinforced by an inequitable, dysfunctional global financial architecture.

Mr President, for the past year and a half, a full-scale war is being waged in the centre of Europe; the United Nations appears unwilling or unable to influence the events taking place in Ukraine. Ghana has sat on the Security Council throughout this period, and can testify that the global solidarity we seek to reignite under the umbrella of the UN will only happen if, and when, it suits those who wield the mighty power of veto. And,

at the moment, there is nothing to show that these countries have any interest or inclination to do so.

Ghana still believes that this Organisation provides the best vehicle for the world to manage its hydra-headed problems, but it can only function effectively, and meet our expectations, when we reform the pillars upon which it rests; anything short of that will continue to undermine its credibility.

Mr President, I do not refer to the events in Ukraine, and seek to pretend to ignore the tragic events in my own neighbourhood of West Africa and the Sahel.

Instability in the Sahel and widespread terrorist activities have put West African countries under severe political pressure and economic strain. Several countries in the region have lost vast stretches of territory to the rampaging terrorists. Coup d'états have reemerged as what some mistakenly hope would be the solution to the threats that confront their nations.

We, in the West African Region, are trying as best as we can, under the very trying conditions we face, to deal with the situation. We are convinced that the conflicts that continue to plague our continent and our Region, in particular, would be more satisfactorily resolved if the international community was to support, not undermine, the efforts of our regional and continental organisations to deal with them. Africans fought and died in the Second World War in defence of Europe and her Allies, who reset the world towards the path of peace and prosperity that their nations and citizens have enjoyed for decades now. It is surely time for the world to reciprocate in our time of need.

Mr President, we, in Ghana, are holding firm to our belief in democracy as the best route to building the prosperous nation that is our aim. It is true that the economic dividends that many

of our citizens justifiably expected from the democratic process have not come as fast as had been anticipated, but we are determined to hold fast to the course because we believe that, ultimately, it will succeed.

We are also having to countenance, for the first time in recent human history, not just the questioning of democracy and a deliberate campaign of disinformation against democracy, but also the propagation of authoritarian rule as a faster route to economic advancement. The belief of young people in democracy as the governance model best suited to build peace and prosperity in our society is under systematic attack.

The economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine have only added to the pressure and the anxiety of our young people.

We can certainly also do without having to spend the huge amounts we are currently spending on security at our northern borders in particular.

At this time, unhappily, we feel no sense of the international solidarity that we believe we should receive. It is surely in the interest of the whole world that West Africa should be peaceful and prosperous. We want our young people to be part of a peaceful and prosperous West Africa, rather than part of the thousands that arrive at an unwelcoming Europe after perilous journeys across the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea.

Mr President, we do not seek to shirk any responsibility for the problems we face that are of our own making, and it bears repeating that we are not craving for sympathy, and do not want to be a scar on anybody's conscience. But, we cannot, and the world should not pretend that the present day economic and social conditions of Africa have nothing to do with the historical injustices that have fashioned the structures of the world.

It is time to acknowledge openly that much of Europe and the United States have been built from the vast wealth harvested from the sweat, tears, blood and horrors of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the centuries of colonial exploitation. Maybe we should also admit that it cannot be easy to build confident and prosperous societies from nations that, for centuries, had their natural resources looted and their peoples traded as commodities.

For centuries, the world has been unwilling and unable to confront the realities of the consequences of the slave trade, but gradually this is changing, and it is time to bring the subject of reparations firmly to the fore. Granted that current generations are not the ones that engaged in the slave trade, but that grand inhuman enterprise was state-sponsored and deliberate; and its benefits are clearly interwoven with the present-day economic architecture of the nations that designed and executed it.

Reparations must be paid for the slave trade. No amount of money will ever make up for the horrors, but it would make the point that evil was perpetrated, that millions of productive Africans were snatched from the embrace of our continent, and put to work in the Americas and the Caribbean without compensation for their labour.

If there are any hesitations in some minds about the paying of reparations, it is worth considering the fact that, when slavery was abolished, the slave owners were compensated for the loss of the slaves, because the human beings were labelled as property, deemed to be commodities. Surely, this is a matter that the world must confront, and can no longer ignore. The AU has authorised Ghana to hold a global conference on the issue in November in Accra.

It is probably also the time to return to that vexed subject of illicit financial flows out of the continent of Africa. I refer to the

report of the panel chaired by the highly respected former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, on the illicit flow of funds from Africa, which states that Africa is losing, annually, more than eighty-eight billion United States dollars (\$88 billion) through illicit financial outflows.

Yes, those monies too must be returned to the continent. It is difficult to understand why the recipient countries are comfortable about retaining such funds, and are happy to call those countries from whom the monies are taken as corrupt. I believe that a joint taskforce of the African Union Commission and the OECD Secretariat, under the auspices of the UN, should be charged to find ways of stopping the damaging outflows.

Mr President, before the pandemic, we, like many other parts of the world, were making progress with the seventeen (17) SDGs, and we had good reason to believe we would achieve the 2030 target.

Today, the picture we have on our performance is not very bright. Most of the twenty-one (21) targets designated for achievement by 2020 have not been met, and we are not on track to achieve many other targets by 2030. According to the 2023 SDG report, just twelve percent (12%) of the SDGs targets are on track to be achieved. Progress on fifty percent (50%) of the targets is weak. The most disappointing part is that we have stalled or retrogressed more than thirty percent (30%) of the targets. We need to accelerate action on the entire project.

Mr President, it is within our capacity to turn things around. A good start would be to make the needed changes to the structures of our organisation; then we can rebuild trust and reignite global solidarity.

I thank you for your attention.

