

Prime Minister Meloni's speech at the 78th United Nations General Assembly



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Mr President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to represent Italy before this General Assembly of the United Nations. An honor that is, however, not light like privilege, but heavy like the weight of responsibility.

We are living in complex times, of continuous emergencies and change, and we cannot afford the luxury of words of circumstance, of lofty principles that have never been realized, of easy choices in the place of the right ones.

We need to look back at the profound meaning of what gave life to this place, the Community of Nations and Peoples that are reflected in the United Nations Charter of 1945, which was created to find shared solutions that could guarantee peace and prosperity.

There are basically two, fundamental premises that give meaning to these halls. On one hand, there are Nations that exist because they reflect humankind's innate need to feel a sense of belonging to a community, to a certain people and to be able to share with others the same historical memory, the same laws, the same customs and traditions. In a word: one's identity.

On the other hand, there is the aspiration of these Nations, that are different from each other, to find a place where to resolve international disputes through an instrument that may be more difficult to use, but is definitely more effective than resorting to force, that is, the instrument of Reason.

If these two premises, the Nation and Reason, are still the foundation of our action, then we must reject the utopistic and self-serving narrative of those who say that a world without Nations, without borders and without identity, would be a world without war and conflict. Just as fiercely, we must thwart the return to the use of force as a tool to resolve international conflict.

Russia's war of invasion of Ukraine tells us precisely this: that over those who want to take us back to a world of dominion, neo-imperial wars, which we thought we had done away with in the past century, Reason can still prevail and the love of

Country, the value of the Nation, can still be safeguarded beyond the unimaginable.

It's up to us, each and every one of us, to decide on what side of history we want to stand, in good conscience. But let's not fool ourselves, because this is what is at stake: the choice between Nation and Chaos, and between Reason and Prevarication.

Italy made a clear choice as to where it stands. It did so out of a sense of justice and because it is aware of how difficult it would be to govern a world, in which the upper hand is given to those who bombard civilian infrastructure hoping to bring a people to its knees with cold and darkness, to those who weaponize energy and blackmail developing nations, blocking exports of grain – the raw material needed to feed millions of people.

The repercussions of the conflict in Ukraine overwhelm us all like a domino effect, but mainly impact nations of the world's south. It's a war waged not only against Ukraine but against the poorest Nations.

Italy's attention is particularly focused on Africa, where Nations already beleaguered by long periods of drought and by the effects of climate change, are now faced with a situation compounded by food insecurity, making them more vulnerable to instability, and easier prey for terrorism and fundamentalism.

And this is a choice. To create chaos and spread it. And in this chaos that produces tens of millions of people potentially in search of better living conditions, are infiltrated criminal networks that profit from desperation to collect easy billions.

They are the traffickers of human beings that organize the trade of illegal mass immigration. They deceive those who rely on them to migrate to find a better life, having them pay thousands of dollars for trips to Europe they sell with brochures, as if they were regular travel agencies, but those brochures don't tell you that those trips all too often can lead to death, to a grave at the bottom of the

Mediterranean Sea. Because they don't care whether the boat used is unfit for that type of travel or not, the only important thing for them is the profit margin.

These are the people, who owing to a certain hypocritical approach to the issue of immigration, have become rich beyond measure. We want to battle against the mafia in all of its forms; and we will battle against this too. The fact is that the fight against organized crime should be an objective that unites us all, and that also invests the United Nations.

Can an organization like this, which reaffirms in its founding act "...faith in the dignity and worth of the human person..." turn a blind eye to this tragedy?

Can we really pretend to not see that no other criminal activity in the world today is more lucrative than the trafficking of migrants – when it is the UN reports themselves that have shown how this business has reached – by volume of money – the same level of drug-trafficking and has largely surpassed that of arms-trafficking?

Can this Assembly of the United Nations, which in other times was fundamental to definitively eradicating the universal crime of slavery, today tolerate its comeback under other forms, that the commercialization of human life continues, that there are women brought to Europe forced into prostitution to repay the enormous debt they incur with their traffickers, or that there are men thrust into the hands of organized crime?

Can we really say that it is solidarity to receive, as a priority, not those who are truly entitled, but those who can afford to pay these traffickers, to allow these criminals to establish who has the right to be saved and who doesn't?

I don't think so, and I believe it is the duty of this organization to reject any hypocritical approach to this issue and wage a global war without mercy against traffickers of human beings.

And to do so, we need to work together at every level. Italy plans to be on the front line on this issue.

With the Rome Process, launched in July with the Conference on Migration and Development, we have engaged Mediterranean and various African nations in a process that follows two main paths: defeat the slave-traders of the Third Millennium, and at the same time, tackle the root causes of migration, with the objective of guaranteeing the first of rights, that is the right of not having to emigrate, of not being forced to leave one's home, one's family, to cut off one's roots, and being able to find in one's own land the conditions to achieve one's own fulfillment.

Here too, we must have the courage to tell it like it is. Africa is not a poor continent. To the contrary, it is rich with strategic resources. It holds half of the world's minerals, including abundant rare earths, and 60% of arable lands that are often not utilized. Africa is not a poor continent, but it has been often, and still is, an exploited continent. Too often the interventions of foreign nations on the continent have not respected local realities. Often the approach was predatory, and in spite of this fact – even paternalistic.

We must change course. Italy wants to contribute to the construction of a model of cooperation capable of collaborating with African nations so they may grow and prosper from the great resources they possess. A cooperation from equal to equal, because Africa needs no charity, but to be put in the condition to compete on an equal footing, on strategic investments that can tie our futures together with mutually beneficial projects.

In this way we can offer a serious alternative to the phenomenon of mass migration; an alternative that is work, training, opportunities for nations of origin and pathways for legal and agreed migration, and thus integratable.

We will be the first to set a good example through the “Mattei Plan for Africa”, a development cooperation plan named after Enrico Mattei, a great Italian who

knew how to balance Italy's national interests with the rights of Partner States to witness their own moment of development and progress.

The focal point is that we have to have the courage to put humankind, and human rights, back at the center of our action. It seems like a self-evident principle, but it is no longer the case. Countries are invaded, wealth is more and more concentrated, poverty is rampant, the slave-trade is re-emerging – all of this seems poised to put the sacredness of the human being at risk.

Even what would seem, at a superficial glance, a tool that could improve the well-being of humanity, at a closer look can turn out to be a risk.

Just think of artificial intelligence. The applications of this new technology may offer great opportunities in many fields, but we cannot pretend to not understand its enormous inherent risks.

I am not sure if we are adequately aware of the implications of technological development whose pace is much faster than our capacity to manage its effects.

We were used to progress that aimed to optimize human capacities, while today we are dealing with progress that risks replacing human capacities. Because, if in the past, this replacement focused on physical tasks, so that humans could dedicate themselves to intellectual and organizational work, today the human intellect risks being replaced, with consequences that could be devastating, particularly, for the job market. More and more people will no longer be necessary, in a world ever-dominated by disparities, by the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the few.

This is not a world we want – which is why we should not mistake this dominion for a free zone without rules. We need global governance mechanisms that ensure that these technologies respect ethical boundaries; that technological evolution is put at the service of humanity and not vice versa. We must guarantee the practical application of the concept of “Algor-ethics”, that is, ethics for algorithms.

These are some of the major themes Italy plans to put at the center of the G7 in 2024. But these are mainly issues that are the responsibility of the United Nations.

These are enormous challenges that we will not be able to tackle if we do not also acknowledge our limitations, as nations and as part of the multilateral system. For this reason, Italy supports the need for a reform of the Security Council that will make it more representative, transparent and effective. A Council that can guarantee a fairer geographical distribution of seats and that can strengthen regional representation as well;

that emerges from an order frozen in time, established by the outcomes of a conflict that ended eighty years ago, in another century, in another millennium, so that everyone has the opportunity to demonstrate their worth at the present time.

On these and many other issues, we will be tested in our capacities to govern our times, and in our ability to do what here in this assembly hall, on 2 October 1979, a great man, saint and statesman, Pope John Paul II, recalled: that is, that political activity, whether national or international, comes from “the human being”, is practised “by the human being” and is meant for the “human being”.

Thank you all for your attention.

[Courtesy translation]