

UNGA78 New Zealand General Debate statement

Kotahi ano te kōhao o te ngira e kuhu ai te miro mā, te miro whero, te miro pango, Kia mau Kia te ture, te whakapono ko te mea nui ko te aroha.

[There is only one eye of the needle through which the white, the red and black threads must pass, holdfast to the lore, faith and above all else love]

These opening words taken from my ancestor remind me that no matter where or who we are from around the world, we are bound by a shared spirit of humanity.

Can I acknowledge the Lanape people on whose tribal lands we stand.

Tena koutou katoa.

It is a great pleasure to stand before you all today in New York, the homeland of the Lenape, who I had the honour of meeting with yesterday.

I have been encouraged by the commitment I have witnessed in this great hall to find transformative solutions to the interlocking challenges we face.

At the same time, I am deeply concerned that the sum of our collective efforts to meet these challenges is falling well short of what is required.

We meet at a time of sharply increasing danger for people and the planet.

As we emerge from the worst health emergency in the past hundred years, our efforts to 'build back better' have faltered in the face of accelerating ecological and planetary crises, deepening conflict, and instability. We are failing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

We must rise to meet these challenges. We owe it to our citizens, and to the generations that follow us.

Mounting distrust and division are eroding the foundation of international cooperation and steering the multilateral system towards deadlock and dysfunction.

We have no hope of meeting our shared challenges by going it alone. We live in an inter-connected and inter-dependent world, in which we will thrive – or perish - together.

For the first time in several generations, we face the very real possibility of conflict between major powers.

Mr President, Excellencies: we cannot let this happen. The stakes for all of us are simply too high. The international rule of law and the UN Charter must mean something to a growing generation that are becoming more sceptical.

We are not on track to keep global warming at 1.5 degrees. Conflict and crises continue to impact, most harshly on women and children. The fabric of democratic principles is challenged and weakened by mis- and dis-information, and the list continues.

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine last year was a direct attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a UN member state.

But it was much more than this.

To witness a permanent member of the UN Security Council launch an unprovoked attack on a sovereign state, attempting to annex its territory and waging war on its civilian population was and remains shocking.

Russia's actions violate the most fundamental tenets of international law. How can younger generations have confidence in the UN when a permanent member of the Security Council acts in a manner so fundamentally contrary to the UN Charter?

The consequences of Russia's ongoing war of aggression are stark. The suffering of Ukrainians is immense. Ukraine's neighbours are bearing a heavy burden. Sadly we are seeing children being weaponised in this unjust war – this is wrong in every way.

Aotearoa New Zealand strongly supports efforts to hold Russia to account in both the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

This war has also highlighted geostrategic tensions and heightened nuclear risks. Nuclear weapons must never be used. We must be unequivocal in our determination to reduce nuclear threats, and do so immediately.

The dangers of nuclear weapons and their toxic legacy – which are visible in our own Blue Pacific region - have been with us for decades.

Other, newer technological developments also pose profound challenges in balancing the potential of their peaceful use with the threat of catastrophic harm if their development and military use is left unchecked.

We must commit to international rules and limits on Autonomous Weapon Systems, and establish clear norms to address responsible use of other new and emerging technologies, including AI, as well as the continued peaceful use of outer space.

We must also confront digital challenges, including cyber threats, and online extremism through smart coalitions in which governments work effectively with civil society and industry.

This is our approach with the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online. The Christchurch Call is a global multistakeholder coalition that extends beyond traditional statecraft and governmental institutions.

It has successfully galvanised significant policy change, improved tech companies' crisis readiness, and built strong, collaborative relationships across sectors.

Conflict and crisis is placing incredible pressure on the humanitarian system.

Food insecurity is threatening the lives of hundreds of millions of people across the globe.

Allow me to be clear. Food is not a weapon; hunger is not a tool.

Pervasive drought in the Horn of Africa, and instability and violence in the Sahel, Afghanistan, Syria, and Myanmar has left many millions in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Playing politics with innocent lives is cruel and immoral.

As we mark the half way point in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, it is time to move beyond divisive narratives and polemics. Now is the time to act to achieve meaningful progress against the Sustainable Development Goals. The call to action is urgent.

Last December, we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to speak out against violations of human rights, wherever they occur. There is no hierarchy when it comes to human rights abuses.

We must resist attempts to undermine or hollow out existing commitments.

Aotearoa New Zealand will continue to fiercely protect the rights of women and girls.

Mr President,

New Zealand has long and deep connections to the Pacific through language, peoples, ocean, history, culture, politics, and shared interests. We also have a strong connection to the wider Indo-Pacific region.

We are concerned that the order that has underpinned prosperity and security in our region for most of the past seven decades is increasingly fraying.

We do not believe that recent events witnessed in other parts of the world need become the inevitable trajectory of our Blue Pacific region.

Diplomacy is our strongest tool. Peace and stability is our goal.

Our regional architecture must be inclusive and provide space for all those who wish to contribute positively to our region. And those who engage in our region must understand Pacific values and norms.

We are committed to promoting the centrality of the Pacific Islands Forum in addressing regional challenges. The 2050 Blue Pacific strategy is our road map.

International partners are encouraged to listen, engage and contribute to the sustainable development of our region, in a manner that puts the priorities of the region first and recognises the independence of those for whom the region is home.

The message to partners of the Pacific is “commitment with consistency”.

Recent global shocks have reminded us that building resilient communities and societies requires a broad and holistic approach to development. Strengthening resilience requires us to value progress across all dimensions of well-being. Social, economic, and environmental development are interlinked and interdependent.

We must urgently achieve reform that contributes to intergenerational well-being of developing states.

We acknowledge the UN Secretary-General’s call to find systemic solutions to the shortcomings of the international financial architecture. International financial institutions need to evolve to better serve the demands of the current era.

We are encouraged to see growing recognition of broader measures of development that go beyond Gross National Income.

Tools, such as the development of a multi-dimensional vulnerability index, offer opportunities to respond to the realities of those who are most vulnerable to external shocks, such as Small Island Developing States.

Sustainable development will only be achieved if the international community delivers on its commitments to those who are experiencing the violent realities of climate change.

Climate change is the greatest existential threat facing the planet. A stable climate is essential to a stable future.

Aotearoa New Zealand is committed to playing its part in global efforts to combat the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

No country is immune to the impacts of climate change, which are real and happening now. The countries of the Pacific are on the frontlines, and are already experiencing irreversible loss and damage.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has sent a very clear message that the world is not on track to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. With the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement, COP28 later this year is an opportunity for course correction.

Limiting warming to 1.5 degrees is vital to achieve our shared development goals. Every increment of a degree, and every tonne of emissions matters. We have a narrow and rapidly closing window to secure a sustainable and liveable future for all.

We call on all countries, especially major emitters, to align their actions with limiting the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. This means committing to a global phase out of fossil fuels.

Aotearoa New Zealand is taking ambitious action to support the transition to low emissions economies, to climate resilient agriculture, and to sustainable trade policies.

Domestically, we are transitioning to a low-emissions and climate resilient future, and working to meet our 1.5 degrees-aligned Nationally Determined Contribution. We have committed to reducing our emissions by 50 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. Our first Emissions Reduction Plan sets out the actions we will take to achieve our first emissions budgets on a pathway to our 2050 target.

We are investing in Pacific resilience, mobilising climate finance, and supporting Pacific partners to prepare and respond to climate-driven events. At least half of our \$1.3 billion quadrupled climate finance commitment will go to the Pacific.

At COP27, we stood with the Pacific on the priority issue of loss and damage.

Aotearoa New Zealand supports Australia's bid to host COP31 in 2026 in partnership with the Pacific.

We were delighted with the consensus adoption of the UNGA resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the obligations of states with respect to climate change. We acknowledge Vanuatu's leadership. New Zealand was proud to be a member of the core group that drove this initiative. It was an example of effective, cross-regional multilateral diplomacy.

Going forward, we will work with a diverse coalition to address the adverse impacts of sea level rise, including preserving the heritage, statehood, and

sovereignty of countries facing existential threats as a result of the climate crisis.

Aotearoa New Zealand welcomed the adoption of the global ocean biodiversity treaty (BBNJ) in March, which represents the most significant upgrade of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) framework in 40 years.

We celebrate the fact that over seventy states have signed the BBNJ Treaty this week. It reminds us of what we can achieve when we focus on our interests in the planet we share, and work long and hard to bridge divides between states.

We also applauded the UN Environment Assembly's agreement last year to launch negotiations on an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution.

The Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework agreed last year marked a welcome step forward in halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

These significant successes show that the stakes are too high for us to leave the triple planetary crisis solely in the hands of government.

Indigenous Peoples, businesses, financial institutions, local governments, youth, communities and individuals all have crucial roles to play.

Contemporising our multilateral institutions to ensure they are inclusive and fit for today's challenges must be a high priority. There has never been a greater need for innovation and creativity to secure the central place of the UN in addressing the collective challenges we face.

That is why New Zealand actively supports initiatives to revitalise and reform the United Nations, its organs, and the wider multilateral system.

As a founding member of the United Nations and unwavering supporter of the international rules based system, it is difficult to admit that our multilateral institutions are imperfect.

They have and they will fail us.

But Aotearoa New Zealand's response will always be to find ways to make them stronger.

Fiercely independent, but global in our outlook, we are driven by a strong sense of our responsibility for helping to uphold key tenets of the international rules-based system – respect for state sovereignty, respect for human rights and gender equality – and for achieving progress in addressing climate change and nuclear weapons.

Mr President,

It is clear that the norms and rules established by the UN Charter, including exercising tolerance and uniting in our strengths, are under considerable strain.

Aotearoa New Zealand acknowledges the legitimacy of distinct political systems, histories and cultures.

At home we choose to embrace difference as a source of strength for resolving challenges rather than as a wedge to divide. We hold on the hope of our forebears and the promise of the sense of nationhood set out in our founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi.

The people we serve deserve our vigilance to achieve this goal.

This is an organisation made up of primarily small states. To deliver on the needs of small states and to achieve truly effective and inclusive multilateralism, we need to find ways to all pull in the same direction, but on our own terms.

Next year's Summit of the Future, which has its origins in the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda, provides an opportunity to rebuild trust amongst nations and contemporise the way we work.

We can and we should take full advantage of this opportunity. Aotearoa New Zealand stands ready to work with partners to ensure a robust outcome that best serves present and future generations.

Never in recent history has there been a greater need for transformative solutions to interlocking global challenges.

I, for one, don't believe in inevitabilities.

In fact, the disruptions we are enduring provide an opportunity to reset.

We must rise above polarisation and draw strength from our differences, rather than allowing them to create division.

Whiria te tāngata - *weave the people together.*