

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates, and all stakeholders here present,

It is my honor and privilege, as President of the United Nations General Assembly, to welcome you to this Hall for the opening of the General Debate of the 78th session.

Allow me to acknowledge in our midst today, several former Presidents of the General Assembly, including His Excellency Han Seung-soo, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea who served as President of the 56th Session of the Assembly, and who now sits as Chair of the UN Council of Former Presidents of the General Assembly (UNCPGA).

Together, this General Assembly Hall and this rostrum, stand as a living testament to multilateralism and to the extraordinary role and compelling influence of the United Nations over the 75 years of its existence.

It is a unique and truly global platform for debate, dialogue, and problem-solving through multilateral diplomacy.

This year our imperative is clear: to **unite the nations**, to be united in conviction of common purpose and in solidarity of joint action.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Excellencies,

Such a common coordinated approach is needed now, as much as at any point in our history.

War. Climate change. Debt. Energy and food crises. Poverty and famine.

These crises are directly impacting the lives and well-being of billions of people around the world.

They are rolling back decades of hard-won development gains, and thus condemning millions to lifelong intergenerational poverty and hardship.

It is at times like these that we must search deep within to find our better selves and our common humanity that impels us to meet the moment.

I therefore implore you, let us use this forum for that which it was intended.

Let us listen and learn. Let us rebuild trust and reignite global solidarity. And let us find common ground to address the challenges we face.

In the words of the late, great Madeline Albright, “If the UN did not exist, we would have to invent it.”

We are fortunate, therefore, that it does exist. Let us therefore make full and effective use of this unparalleled resource.

(PAUSE)

Excellencies,

This message is all the more important in light of the **continued violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a fellow member of the United Nations – Ukraine.**

That horrendous war has unleashed untold suffering and destroyed countless families, communities, and lives.

Its cascading impacts has also spooked many developing countries – in far-flung corners of the globe – unleashing acute shortages of essential commodities, triggering food insecurity and volatility in energy prices.

It has even revived the unconscionable threat of nuclear warfare.

We all want this war to end. It is an affront to everything that this organization and the UN Charter stands for.

We need just and sustainable peace in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world, in line with international law and with the UN Charter.

Peace must also be given a chance in other parts of the globe – from Africa to the Middle East.

With the adoption of Agenda 2063, Africa spelt a clear path for “**The Africa We Want**” – and the continent still has a great chance to cut a corner in consolidating democracy and good governance.

But the resurgence of coups in Africa is a regressive step – and the root causes of such an alarming trend must be carefully analyzed and addressed.

I urge you, Member States, to use this High-Level Week – not to fan the flames of conflict and hostility – but instead, to opt for dialogue and diplomacy.

We must remember that **peace** is an investment in our collective prosperity.

I call on leaders to come together, to abide by the Charter, and support efforts to deliver a peaceful resolution to the war.

(PAUSE)

Excellencies,

Yesterday, we began our High-Level Week with the **SDG Summit**.

It offered a prime moment to take stock of our successes and failures in delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Front and center were the fact that 1.2 billion people are living in multidimensional poverty as of 2022.

While some progress had been made on the Goals, the Summit is being convened in a context where there have been unacceptable delays and rollbacks.

Let me be clear: we do not have the luxury of excuses, nor are we absolved of our responsibilities.

The onus is on us – collectively – to make up for the lost momentum and work much harder in the remaining seven years to accelerate progress on that which we have promised to deliver.

The commitment to action presented at the Summit should therefore be the tailwind to regain lost ground and supercharge implementation.

(PAUSE)

Excellencies,

The SDG Summit was only the start of what is a full agenda during this High-Level Week.

It naturally interlinks with the General Assembly's **High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development** – which is key to accelerating the financing impetus for the SDGs.

The preparatory ministerial meeting for the **Summit for the Future** will help to launch the negotiations of the **Pact for the Future** – giving guidance on how to ensure the United Nations is fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

It will give Member States the opportunity to come together, and to transform our shared future.

We will also see three health-related High-Level Meetings on: **Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response; Universal Health Coverage; and Tuberculosis** – all of which offer us opportunities to better the lives of our global citizens.

And the **Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit** offers a moment to build political ambition ahead of COP28 in November.

Tomorrow I will also join hands with several Heads of State and Government to convene a Breakfast Summit to address the **existential threats posed by sea-level rise** – an issue of significant concern to small island developing states, especially those in the pacific region.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Excellencies,

Allow me to pause here and reiterate my deepest condolences to the Governments and peoples of Morocco and Libya.

The twin disasters of earthquakes and flooding have left thousands dead and untold more suffering.

It is my sincere hope that resources and relief can be expedited to support all those who now find themselves in desperate need.

As a citizen of a climate-vulnerable region, I urge Member States to recognize the continued and escalating impacts of climate change – and to deliver real, transformative results.

Let us work together to unlock the finances and resources required to support those most vulnerable in mitigation, adaptation, and resilience-building.

And let us continue work on the **Multidimensional Vulnerability Index** – with the aim of moving beyond GDP to a measure of economic development that captures a country’s true vulnerability to external shocks.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

Excellencies,

Beyond the High-Level Week, this year we will commemorate the **75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.

This is an opportunity to re-dedicate ourselves to the principles enshrined in the Declaration and to remind ourselves that “we are all born free and equal in dignity and rights”.

As President of the 78th Session, I am committed to championing vulnerable and marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, persons living with disabilities and older persons.

I have committed to ensure that we do not continue to neglect countries in special situations, and I intend to soon launch the **High-Level Advisory Group on LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS**.

But first and foremost, we need to work for all women and girls, who are appallingly still struggling for equality and respect.

We must ‘walk the talk’ on **gender equality and women’s empowerment**. This means according women full, equal, and meaningful participation at every level.

As an international gender champion, I am strongly committed to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, and I have appointed a Special Envoy and Special Adviser on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment to assist me in this endeavor.

(PAUSE FOR CLOSE)

Excellencies,

Before I close, allow me to emphasize this: despite the many and complex challenges we face, we do have the capacity to effect change, consequential change.

We CAN make a meaningful difference to the lives of billions of people, if we so choose.

We do not lack capacity. What we lack is the will to act.

By putting aside our differences and bridging divides we can deliver **Peace, Progress, Prosperity, and Sustainability** to everyone, everywhere.

So let us step up and take action now.

Let us re-energize the UN General Assembly and demonstrate our capacity and our will to deliver for all.

In the words of Steven Pressfield, an author born in Trinidad and Tobago:

“The most pernicious aspect of procrastination is that it can become a habit. We don't just put off our lives today; we put them off till our deathbed. Never forget: This very moment, we can change our lives. There never was a moment, and never will be, when we are without the power to alter our destiny. This second, we can turn the tables on Resistance. This second, we can sit down and do our work.”

Excellencies, I thank you once again for your support to me and my Presidency and I wish you a fruitful, productive, and healthy debate.

Thank you.