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PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement by the President of the
Republic of Poland
at the 78. Session of the United Nations
General Assembly

New York, 19 September 2023

Distinguished President,

Excellencies,

Honorable Delegates,

I wish to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Dennis Francis on his election to the honorable function of the President of the 78th United Nations General Assembly. I wish to express Poland's full support for his mission and wish him every success in its fulfilment. At the same time, my thanks go out to His Excellency Csaba Kőrösi (wym.: Czaba Koroszi) in recognition of his active engagement while presiding over the work of the 77th session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

193 countries from every continent have gathered in New York, at UN headquarters to discuss the most important threats and challenges facing the world today.

The United Nations General Assembly is an extremely important event: it is the only place and the only opportunity to debate in our midst the crucial problems that affect us all.

We are here because of the courageous and forward-looking decisions made by the leaders of the Western world during the darkest days of the Second World War. At that time, they pondered over how to avoid similar tragedies in the future.

The leaders of the United States and Great Britain, President Roosevelt, and Prime Minister Churchill, and soon the other

countries of the anti-Hitler coalition, including Poland, signed the Atlantic Charter. It contained the most important principles on which the post-war world order was to be based: self-determination of nations, inviolability of borders, renunciation of violence, economic cooperation, human rights.

The Atlantic Charter, together with the Washington Declaration, were the cornerstone in the building of the United Nations Organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today once again, it befell on us to live in dangerous times! As a result of Russia's full-scale aggression on Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives or suffered injuries, millions were forced to flee their own home country, and hundreds of millions worldwide are facing the specter of famine, and serious economic disruptions. Russia's brutal aggression brought immense global problems in its aftermath. It put to a test international world order.

Costs of those barbarian actions, humanitarian, material and environmental, are incalculable and still growing. For long, world peace has never been as threatened, as it is today.

We, Poles, know full well that peace is not to be taken for granted. September in the history of my home country is a special month. On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded my homeland, Poland. The Second World War broke out.

On 17 September 1939, we received a blow from another direction. The Soviet Union also made an onslaught on Poland.

In the wake of the alliance between Hitler and Stalin, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, Poland lost its independence, was wiped out from the map of the world, and subjected to extremely brutal occupation.

This is precisely why we understand the tragedy of Ukraine better than any other country in the world, and the tragedy of other countries experiencing the pandemonium of war. In the Second World War, 6 million of our citizens perished, including 3 million Polish Jews, and Warsaw, the capital of Poland was razed to the ground.

And yet our history stands as a testament that even crimes and persecution are not able to suppress the true spirit of freedom, that freedom will finally prevail! Enslavement, imperialism and neocolonialism are a denial of freedom, as much as insane dreams of dominating the others. When unleashing the war in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin wanted to restore the Russian empire, to divide the world and to make Europe systematically dependent on his raw materials. He has not succeeded! It is my firm belief that he will no longer succeed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today the world needs courageous and visionary leaders. The late president of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, with whom I had the honor to cooperate, was such a leader; the leader, who a dozen of years ago was trying to shake the conscience, to appeal to politicians, to warn of imperial policy of Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Let me recall at this point his seminal words said in Tbilisi at the height of Russian aggression on Georgia in 2008: For the first time in a long time, Russians have shown the face we have known for hundreds of years. They believe that the nations around them should be subject to them. We say no! Russia believes that the old days of the empire that collapsed less than 20 years ago are coming back. That domination will again be a feature of the region. Well, it will not. Those days are over, once and for all.

Yes. Today, in this very place, at the United Nations headquarters I wish to reiterate: those days can never return. The logic of conquest, changing borders by force, disregarding the law, and denying the Ukrainian people their right to exist must be stopped! This brutal war must end, and not be converted into a frozen war! This can only be done by restoring the full territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland's position in the face of any war is clear and straightforward: we demand absolute respect for internationally recognized national borders. The inviolability of these borders is a fundamental element of the world order. Today, the victim is Ukraine. Tomorrow, it could be any one of us, if we do not follow these ironclad rules, if we do not insistently enforce compliance with international law!

Forgotten and unpunished war crimes, crimes against humanity, build a sense of impunity among the perpetrators. Such crimes give permission to their successors and imitators, who, following suit, commit similar crimes when they want to dominate and determine the fate of other states and nations. The crimes in the war in Ukraine are the living proof thereof. That is why we are engaged in initiatives to hold Russia accountable for gross violations of fundamental norms of international law. We strongly support the work of the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. We support the work of the Independent International Commission under the UN Human Rights Council to investigate violations of human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Russian aggression, and to collect, verify and preserve evidence.

We support the idea of establishing an *ad hoc* special tribunal! The crimes must be accounted for, and the perpetrators punished!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Information warfare goes on. Lie is used to cover up and justify Russian crimes on civilian population. Russia continually tries to shape international public opinion by building a false vision of the reality. In Poland, this comes as no surprise to us, but the world is just about to discover the scale of manipulation and disinformation.

The spearhead is often directed also at my country, Poland, libeled in many various ways. This is because we have consistently been opposing Russia's imperial and neo-colonial policy and have supported Ukraine in its defense from the outset. We, as international community must draw conclusions from the situation, we must confront manipulation and disinformation. We must fight against the hypocrisy of history, the reversal of the roles of a henchman, and a victim. What is evil should be called evil! A crime should be called a crime!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These days, many states are blamed for prolonging the war as they supply necessary weapons to Ukraine in its defense war. This is a completely false logic. As if putting the blame on a neighbor who comes to aid to the people next-door defending their own home against mugger. If someone attacks your household, you have the right to defend it, and the neighbors should not stay indifferent. Ukraine would not be able to resist the aggression and effectively stand for its independence if it were not for the assistance of other countries, and primarily on the biggest scale, the United States.

It is the United States that has been playing pivotal role in assuring security in Europe for more than a century. I am saying so as a president of a European country, which was plagued by war experiences on so many occasions.

It must be remembered that the engagement of the United States in the First World War led it to an end, as much as to the

restoration of independence by Poland, and by other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The United States played a pivotal role in defeating Nazi Germany. Without the US support, neither the United Kingdom nor the Soviet Union would have been able to resist Hitler. Finally, the United States was instrumental in the reconstruction of Western Europe in the aftermath of war, and in fending off the threat posed by the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War.

It is too often that Europe tends to forget that it owes its security and prosperity to the US commitment and presence. In Poland we recall this very well, that is why Poland's top priority for the time of our presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2025, will be enhancing transatlantic relations, and cooperation between the EU and the United States!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland has never had colonies, the fact of which we are proud. We emphasize it on all occasions. Instead, my home country was many times brutally attacked, destroyed, and used by the neighbors with their imperial ambitions. For 123 years, Poland disappeared from the maps of the world. That is why we understand very well the countries that suffered colonialism, and the challenges they need to confront. Wherever the international community is in need, Poland is always ready to respond to the call, and without any hesitation. We provide assistance in many corners of the world. Despite the war in the immediate neighborhood, we will continue our support to the Eastern Partnership countries.

We continue to focus on countries of the sub-Saharan region. We are present in the Middle East. Given the refugee crisis caused by the war in Syria, Poland's assistance to Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan will be maintained. Poland will also continue its humanitarian support.

Many places around the world are facing worsening food crises. The situation is most difficult in Africa, where one in five people is suffering from hunger. Also, the population suffering hunger is increasing in West Asia and the Caribbean. Today, an estimated 2.4 billion people lack sustainable regular access to food, of which some 900 million face severe food insecurity.

Therefore, in 2022, we in Poland have supported the World Food Fund's activities in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, including Lebanon, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Syria. We fund our activities mainly through multilateral channels, as well as through Polish NGOs and their local partners.

Poland fully recognizes the ambitions of the African Union to play an even more active role on the global stage. Ensuring peace and development in Africa will be facilitated by good and cost-effective governance and the development of democracy on the continent. We respect "African solutions to African problems," standing ready to share the experience we have gained in the difficult but successful transformation of our economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland is a country of freedom and solidarity. It is known worldwide for the great Solidarity movement which not only

stood for workers' rights but also for freedom and fundamental values. The movement which brought together millions of people, courageously defied the evil and changed the course of modern history bringing about the fall of communism. We are extremely proud of our Solidarity.

Upon Russian aggression on Ukraine, the Poles have once again illustrated that solidarity is not only a great history, but that Solidarity lives in Us. Millions of my compatriots committed themselves to bring aid to the people fleeing the nightmare of war. In the very first days of the war, many journalists were coming to Poland and invariably asked me: "where are the refugee camps?" And my response was: there are not any. There are not. There was no talk about camps, we hosted our guests in our own homes.

We also had the honor of hosting many world leaders who came bringing humanitarian aid, including the United Nations Secretary General and other United Nations high ranking officials.

Thank you for your support and for your presence. Greater solidarity must come as a response to the evil, the war and aggression. Without solidarity there will be no lasting peace!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world today needs more solidarity We believe that the idea of solidarity-based development, which we hold so dear, is a beacon for security and prosperity.

Poland is ready to take on concrete measures to support the United Nations operations undertaken to confront the most fundamental global challenges and threats, social and economic crises. We wish to support the idea of just transition, of economic and social changes that will not lose sight of the human dimension, so that nobody is left behind.

We believe that our experience - as the leader of Central Europe, the fifth economy in the European Union, and the largest state in the Three Seas Initiative can prove valuable to many countries with varying degrees of economic and social development. We are ready to share with our partners from around the world not only our experience in the process of economic transformation, but also specific technologies that many Polish companies have available.

Poland is proud to have been elected as a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council for the 2024-2026 term. A key priority of our ECOSOC membership will be to draw the international community's attention to the impact of global crises, such as armed conflicts, the energy crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and climate change; their impact on socio-economic development.

Time is running out to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, and there are still many challenges ahead, so we must unite and intensify our efforts to accelerate the implementation of individual tasks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today the United Nations measures its strength against various challenges. The decision-making impasse in the Security Council, the situation in which Russia, one of the permanent members of the Council, is deliberately violating the UN Charter, the lengthy debates are considered a symptom of the weakness of both the Organization and its constituent states. There are some people who ask questions about whether the UN is needed at all? Does it fit the times?

On behalf of Poland, a neighbor of attacked Ukraine, a country that has taken in millions of refugees, I emphatically answer: yes. The United Nations is very much needed. No better system for international cooperation has been invented. The United Nations best justifies its existence not here in New York or Geneva, but by bringing aid and assistance to those most in need: children, victims of war, the persecuted and the hungry. Every day. All over the world!

In 2025, the UN will celebrate 80 years of its existence. We remember why it was founded. Today, in these dangerous times, we need a return to the thinking and actions of the founding fathers of the United Nations.

There will be no lasting peace without cooperation, without solidarity between richer and poorer countries, and ultimately without respect for international law. Poland wants cooperation, Poland wants solidarity, Poland wants peace!

Thank you.