

Statement by H.E. Mr. Tobias Billström

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Mr President, Excellencies,

Looking back, we – the international community – did not acknowledge the signs for what they were.

The war in Georgia in 2008, and the aggression in Ukraine since 2014 and in Syria since 2015, clearly show that Russia has no scruples about using military force to reach its political ambitions; recreate its former colonial empire and undermine the European security order as well as the UN Charter.

Mr President,

We open this year's General Assembly at a time when a permanent member of the Security Council, a body tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, has proven its complete disregard for human life. In Ukraine and globally.

Russia is weaponizing food and aggravating the global food crisis, most recently by reimposing its blockade against grain deliveries across the Black Sea, deliberately destroying Ukrainian grain and port infrastructure. In doing so, Russia is limiting the supply of food to many, including the world's most vulnerable.

Meanwhile, the EU's Solidarity Lanes – the efforts to build alternative export routes for food from Ukraine – have become a lifeline. Ukraine exports more than three million tonnes of grain every month through the Solidarity Lanes. Sweden and the EU have also increased our humanitarian food aid globally and boosted support for local food production.

In blatant violation of international law, Russia is attempting to deny Ukraine its right to exist as a sovereign nation. If we allow this to happen, Russia will only continue its imperial ambitions. This will not stop with Ukraine. Ukraine's soldiers are fighting not only for Ukraine's survival, but also for our security and for the respect for territorial integrity.

It is the sovereign right of every state to make its own security policy choices. Exercising this right, Sweden has applied for NATO membership – a historic decision that ends Sweden's military non-alignment, which dates back to 1812. Our NATO membership will increase the security of our country and – together with Finland's membership – improve the stability in the entire Euro-Atlantic area.

Sweden will fulfil its commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty and to all other Allies.

Mr President,

This Assembly has repeatedly condemned Russia's blatant violations of international law, including the UN Charter. The Ukrainian people have suffered from attacks against schools, hospitals and civilian infrastructure.

Russia has abducted thousands of Ukrainian children. The list of Russia's crimes against international law in Ukraine is long.

Russia must, and will, be held to account.

Accountability, including for the Crime of Aggression, is a condition for justice to the victims and a deterrent against future violations. Sweden supports the establishment of a tribunal for the crime of aggression committed against Ukraine.

The UN Charter also forms the basis of Ukraine's Peace Formula, which is receiving support from a growing group of countries in all regions. We welcome initiatives that will contribute to a just and lasting peace based on international law.

This is in the interest of all of us.

Mr President,

The world is indeed in a very different place compared to when the 2030 Agenda was adopted eight years ago. The pace of poverty reduction has slowed down, humanitarian needs are rising and climate change is accelerating. The SDG Summit earlier this week was a much-needed opportunity to regain momentum towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sweden is a committed partner of and contributor to the UN Development System and a substantial donor of humanitarian assistance. It is imperative that the UN Development System continue to strive for increased effectiveness and efficiency, especially at country level.

Swedish official development assistance is generous. We are one of only a handful of countries in the world that reach the UN target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income in development assistance.

Development assistance must work catalytically alongside trade, private investment, improved access to capital and domestic resource mobilisation. Strong national institutions remain a precondition for development.

Multilateral Development Banks play a critical role in achieving the SDGs, working with innovative financing and mobilising financing at scale – both private capital and domestic resources. We support the adaptation of their business model to better address global challenges, while keeping poverty reduction and climate change at the core of their mandate.

Sweden's international development assistance responds to the multiple challenges the world is confronting today and contributes to positive development. Sweden's development assistance is relevant, long-term, efficient and transparent.

The Swedish Government focuses on poverty alleviation and health interventions for the most vulnerable, providing democracy assistance to defenders of human rights and democracy on all continents. We invest in women's and girls' rights and opportunities across the globe.

Mr President,

Climate change is accelerating. This July was the hottest month on record, with extreme weather causing widespread damage.

When the world meets for COP28 in Dubai in November this year, we must unite around higher ambitions. Sweden welcomes the Secretary-General's strong personal commitment to push the global climate agenda forward.

We are pleased that the incoming United Arab Emirates' Presidency is framing climate action as a driver for prosperity and growth.

We must mobilise more climate finance, both public and private, and enhance support to local resilience and climate adaptation. Sweden will continue to do its part, and we call on other countries to increase their contributions.

Climate finance is a key element of Swedish development assistance. The ground-breaking solutions provided by Swedish businesses in areas such as battery production and fossil-free steel are driving climate action in Sweden and supporting the climate transition globally. The synergies between innovation, trade and the private sector are fundamental to achieving the green transition and reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr President,

Emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, are transforming our world. They offer unprecedented possibilities, including to accelerate our efforts on climate change, global health and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This fast-moving development also entails challenges for international security and human rights. Shaping a shared vision of new technologies, based on the values of the UN Charter, will be key to harness their potential and mitigate the risks.

Together with Rwanda, Sweden is co-facilitating the process in the General Assembly of developing a Global Digital Compact that will outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all.

Mr President,

75 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted.

We know for a fact that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are determinants of development. Countries with high levels of democracy have 94 per cent lower infant mortality, and provide 40 per cent more electricity and have 23 per cent more access to safe water than autocracies. Building societies that are democratic, respect human rights and uphold the rule of law will be crucial for how fast we achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Let me particularly underline that women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights – including sexual and reproductive rights – is a key condition for development, and a prerequisite for democracy. Human rights are – and must be – universal. They are not a privilege for the few. They belong to everyone, everywhere.

Mr President,

In recent months, Sweden has witnessed disrespectful burnings of the Quran. These desecrations are being carried out by extremists and provocateurs that seek to sow division between Muslims and non-Muslims.

We must not let these provocateurs succeed.

The Swedish Government is firm in strongly rejecting any act of intolerance. The offensive acts committed by individuals at demonstrations in Sweden do not reflect the opinion of the Swedish Government nor that of the majority of the Swedish people.

Over the years, Sweden has received a great number of Muslims and has strived to integrate the newcomers and their children into our society. Sweden remains in close dialogue with the Muslim world and has invited the Secretary-General of the OIC to visit Sweden.

The rights to freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom to demonstrate are constitutional rights in Sweden. These freedoms have served our society and our social cohesion well and made us an open and free society.

The Swedish Government has decided to carry out an inquiry to review the Public Order Act, which governs the Swedish Police Authority's scope to deny a permit application to hold a public gathering.

We must stand together to combat all forms of racism, intolerance and hatred.

Mr President,

Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine jeopardises nuclear safety and security in Ukraine and beyond. Russia's threats to use nuclear weapons, its declared readiness to conduct a nuclear test and its announcement about deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus are all deeply irresponsible.

The expansion of nuclear arsenals without transparency, the abandonment of arms control agreements and regional proliferation threats give cause for serious concern.

Multilateralism is our best chance to address these challenges and realise the objectives enshrined in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. All states must help drive progress.

Mr President,

Our geographies are linked; our challenges are shared. And as much as our challenges are shared, so are our opportunities. And we must strive to fulfil them together.

This is not the first time the world is faced with numerous and difficult challenges. They will demand a lot from us: extensive collaboration, pragmatism and hard work. Compromises and a shared determination.

History shows us that dark times can be overcome.

Next year's Summit for the Future provides us with the opportunity to confirm our commitment to the UN Charter and a rules-based international order as we tackle the challenges ahead.

Future generations should, to a greater extent, be able to live in security, enjoy human rights and live in prosperous societies. It is our job and our responsibility to make it happen.

Thank you.