

Statement by H.E. Ms Nataša Pirc Musar
President of the Republic of Slovenia
at the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly General Debate

Mr President, let me first congratulate you on your election as the President of the 78th session of the General Assembly. It is truly a great honour to address you for the first time as the President of Slovenia. You lead this institution in the most challenging of times, times such as have not been seen since the establishment of the United Nations. I will return to this point again later.

We live in a world in which various actors, including private companies and individuals, affect international relations at all levels and across sovereign boundaries.

It is a world that has changed demographically and technologically.

It is a world in which human dignity is still not guaranteed for all and is increasingly challenged for the most marginalized and vulnerable people.

It is a world with a set of normative commitments, including legally binding treaties, which are not being implemented. *NP*

It is a world where there are many wars, deadly conflicts, aggressions against states, and the suffering of many civilians who fear for their lives or are affected by the socioeconomic destruction caused by conflicts.

It is a world that has not universally recognised the seriousness of the climate change unfolding before our eyes.

It is a world that lacks global solidarity for the implementation of the development goals that we have all committed to.

It is a world that needs the United Nations, with a reformed, representative Security Council that will be able to respond to all of the mentioned challenges effectively, in an adequate and fair manner.

We should tackle these challenges as One. If we continue to prioritise national interests, private interests, or just some particularistic interests of individual actors, and leave the resolution of global problems on the sidelines, we will extinguish ourselves as a civilization. *NP*

In this context, I would like to briefly touch upon four issues that call for the attention of all of us and which require that we all adopt and implement appropriate measures. climate change, Security Council reform, the pitfalls of the digital age, and gender equality.

On *climate change*. It may sound like a cliché to say that we need to abandon the 'business as usual' mentality. But it is not a cliché. 'Business as usual' is not working! It is failing us all!

Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time. The catastrophic floods that hit Slovenia in August are just one more event among the many, many events around the world that prove the point. I trust that we will be able to overcome the consequences of the floods.

But think of countries that have less capacity to do so. Think of small, island developing states, for example. They are frequent victims of catastrophic natural disasters, but the recovery costs are disproportionately high. *NP*

Everyone should invest in an environmentally sustainable world, but I want to be clear: not everyone equally. Global solidarity is a matter of climate justice. Intergovernmental solidarity – with richer states contributing more than the poorer ones, and with the richest private companies also contributing their fair share – must be guided by the understanding that climate change is a result of human activities – past and present.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce that Slovenia plans to increase its contribution to the Global Climate Fund by 50%.

Addressing the growing financing gap between the needs of developing countries and available financial resources is essential for the implementation of Agenda 2030. However, I am very concerned that the current geopolitical polarisation is hindering collaborative climate action.

I only wish that in such circumstances scientists were listened to more: according to the IPCC, simply keeping our promises would already be a step in the right direction. *NP*

Sustainable development must become our joint and purposeful goal and principle, guiding everyone's behaviour. We must integrate climate action as well as the related question of water and food security into conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and sustainable peacebuilding.

Slovenia continues to be actively involved in ensuring climate and environmental justice, including the right to a clean and healthy environment, and in securing equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all. During the UN 2023 Water Conference, I emphasised: *Water is life. Water is existence. Water is peace.*

It is for this reason that I would like to use this opportunity to repeat our call for the establishment of a UN Special Envoy on Water, which will be an important step towards ensuring the better coherence of water efforts inside and outside of the UN. *NP*

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Mr President,

On 6 June 2023, Slovenia was elected to serve as a non-permanent member of the *UN Security Council* for the period 2024–2025. I would like to use this opportunity to thank you all for your confidence in electing my country to serve on the Council. It is with great honour, profound humility, and a sense of shared responsibility that we assume this task.

Our term will be carried out in response to numerous conversations and exchanges we had with Member States during our campaign.

With regard to the Security Council, I cannot avoid the discussions on its reform, which have been going on for decades. I truly hope that we will soon see the light at the end of the tunnel. Slovenia has always been among the Member States claiming that a change in the composition of permanent and non-permanent membership is long overdue.

The current distribution of seats in the Security Council is neither fair nor representative. *NP*

Furthermore, Slovenia belongs to the majority of Member States that are deeply concerned about the unlimited use of the veto power, which is causing us to lose faith in the Security Council. It also results in the Security Council failing to act when action is required.

In Europe, we view Ukraine as a case in point. Even some permanent Member States have suggested that the P5 should refrain from using the veto, at least in the case of mass atrocities. We are all seeing this most valid suggestion ignored.

In this regard, we commend Liechtenstein's recently introduced veto initiative as an important invitation to the P5 to reflect thoroughly on the situation before resorting to a veto. At the same time, it needs to be recalled that the UN Charter itself gives the P5 an opportunity to express their displeasure with decision-making but still to act responsibly.

They may not like a draft resolution, but they can choose to abstain and let the UN pursue without interruption its main goal: to maintain peace and security for all, not for merely a few, and certainly not for just one. *NP*

Excellencies,

By losing trust, we attack the very foundations of organised society – of our international community. I am afraid that in our *digital age*, part of the problem of losing trust lies with science and technology. Inventions are meant to advance humanity. Social media were not invented to disconnect us, but too often they do exactly that. Artificial Intelligence can be useful, but it can also be dangerous.

In this regard, I applaud the Secretary General's resolve to form a High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence. We need to find a way to govern the development of new technologies, including AI, in a way that does not impede economic, developmental, social, and research opportunities, while not putting us at risk.

A human-centric and human rights-based approach to the full lifecycle of technologies – comprising their design, development, and application, as well as decline – should be the answer. The Global Digital Compact must be centred on this notion. Things can be done, but all actors, including private companies, will need to be on board with honest and meaningful commitment. *NP*

Ensuring that human rights are the foundation of an open, safe digital future is not going to be an easy task. In saying so, I look at the key menace of our time: disinformation. Unfortunately, our time is once again a time of competing of narratives, only that now they are much more complex as regards the threat they pose to humanity.

It is an era of snack news, attention economy, the fabrication of facts, and of increasing disagreements about facts precisely because we no longer trust any narratives. We may have the freedom of information, but we are not protected against false information, manipulation, and deceit. Mr Secretary-General is to the point in referring to the proliferation of hate and lies in the digital space as “grave global harm.”

Big tech companies should take more systematic responsibility for the content they host and moderate. They should better protect users from hate speech, disinformation, and other harmful online content. What is unacceptable offline should not be acceptable online. *NP*

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

I am about to say a few words on a subject so important that I have saved it for the last part of my address – *gender equality*.

This year we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It saddens me that today we are still facing the fact that half of the world's population – women and girls – experience inequality, exclusion, and even brutal violence. This societal marginalisation of women and girls, often coupled with poverty, a lack of opportunities to receive quality education, and exclusion from labour markets and decision-making processes, is not only unjust. It also results in a monumental waste of potential for our societies.

To ensure dignity for everyone, including women and girls, we all must pursue this goal, whether in the West or East, the North or South, or anywhere in between. We should start at home, also in our UN home. *NP*

In this regard, I would like to recall an astounding detail that illustrates the need to take SDG Goal Number 5 very seriously. Namely, that it will take 140 years to achieve the equal representation of women in leadership positions in the workplace. This is unacceptable.

The Secretary-General agrees. The achievement of women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in political and public life is part of his New Agenda for Peace.

That is why I am very much in favour of initiatives to achieve this objective, including within the framework of the United Nations. On this particular point, I am thinking of the initiative from the Group of Women Leaders Voices for Change and Inclusion concerning the alternation of the gender of the presidency of the UN General Assembly.

Mr President, you are presiding over an assembly of the most important global institution. We are all painfully aware of the fact that hitherto only four presidents of the General Assembly have been women. Only four in its entire history! We should live up to our own declarations on gender equality and materialise them in the work of the General Assembly as well. This would be a vivid and symbolic way of demonstrating our joint commitments. *NP*

Excellencies,

As I leave this podium, I would like to reaffirm the need for multilateralism. This needs to be a different type of multilateralism, one that is effective and inclusive, making the UN an actor and a forum fully fit for the future. The most pressing challenges today – and I have elaborated on some of them – cannot be addressed by individual states, no matter their size or power. This must be a collective effort, or our children and grandchildren will be affected, much more than the generation of leaders gathered here. We must work towards a new global compact, which needs to be principled, rise above particularistic interests, and be based on global solidarity. It needs to prioritise the protection of nature and human dignity. It also needs to have a long horizon. Slovenia is fully committed to contributing to the Pact for the Future and we look forward to actively engaging in the upcoming Summit next year. We must be ambitious, even if do not agree on solutions to all the emerging challenges. We need to use our power and resources to put all our collective efforts into action in order to solve them. Better one by one than none.