

Remarks by H.E. Cho Tae-yul
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General Debate

79th Session of the UN General Assembly

New York, September 27, 2024

(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,

I extend my congratulations to His Excellency Philemon Yang on assuming the Presidency of the 79th session of the General Assembly.

Let me also pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres for his dedication to global peace and prosperity.

(State of the world in 2024)

The year 2024 has sadly earned the distinction of being the most conflict-ridden year since World War II.

Across the globe, from Ukraine to the Middle East, conflict and division have torn at the fabric of human dignity.

Two billion people, or roughly 1 in 4, reside in conflict zones; 310 million people require humanitarian assistance worldwide, and more than 120 million, or 1 in 70, are refugees.

Meanwhile, records suggest that we are brushing dangerously close to the critical threshold of 1.5 Celsius degrees.

Most worrying of all, the international community seems to be losing the sense of what these numbers really stand for: real lives disrupted, families displaced, futures lost, and a planetary crisis looming.

As the war of aggression against Ukraine drags on to its third year, as seemingly intractable challenges mount with no end in sight, cynicism and powerlessness are hardening in some quarters.

There is a growing belief that multilateralism is ineffective and that the United Nations is no longer relevant.

(Republic of Korea: Proof that UN in Action Works)

But I stand before you today to affirm that this is not true.

My nation's very existence as a free, democratic, and prosperous country is the proof that the United Nations in action works.

It was the first-ever UN-led coalition that defended the freedom and democracy in the Republic of Korea ravaged by war in early 1950s.

Our journey from devastation to democracy and prosperity was made possible by the continued support of the international community, particularly through UN agencies and programs.

The story of the Republic of Korea provides the antidote against paralyzing defeatism. It is a story of what we can achieve when good men and women choose to act together. A concrete evidence that multilateral system can make a real difference.

If global challenges are mounting, then we must double down on multilateralism. We need more of UN in action, not less.

(Summit of the Future)

This is why I applaud the timely and proactive initiative of Secretary General António Guterres to convene the *Summit of the Future* this year.

As we prepare to mark the 80th session of the UN General Assembly next year, we must ask ourselves: what will be the UN's role in the decades to come? Where do we see ourselves in the 90th and the 100th session of the UN General Assembly?

The Pact for the Future is the culmination of all our soul-searching at the *Summit of the Future*. It galvanizes our resolve to act not just for the present but for the future generations as well.

(Republic of Korea in Action: Triple Roles in the UN)

Mr. President,

Now, the onus is on each and every one of the UN Members to fulfill the commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement.

Earlier I mentioned that 'UN in action' works. But we must not forget, 'UN in action' actually means 'UN Members in action.'

Under the foreign policy vision of President Yoon Suk Yeol, the Republic of Korea seeks to be a Global Pivotal State, recognizing both its indebtedness to the multilateral systems and its growing ability to be their champion.

The Republic of Korea is committed to do its part as a UN Member by serving three functions: a facilitator, a supporter and an initiator.

First, in the global efforts to build sustainable peace, the Republic of Korea will act as a facilitator.

Peace is not merely the absence of conflict; it is the sustainable presence of security and opportunity. The Republic of Korea understands this deeply, having endured the trials of war and division.

Today, the Republic of Korea is one of the core contributors to UN peacekeeping and peace-building efforts around the world. Its troops and experts serve in some of the world's most volatile regions, providing not just security but hope.

To ensure that peace is durable, however, it is important to go beyond the individual efforts of contributing countries.

The Republic of Korea advocates strengthening the UN's peacebuilding architecture, with the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) at its core, fulfilling its unique mandate to bridge all three pillars of the UN to bring greater coherence and a more integrated approach.

We will actively participate in the peacebuilding architecture review next year, with a focus on how to strengthen the humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) nexus.

We will also align our humanitarian aid and development cooperation programs with the United Nations' activities to promote peace and security around the world, and collaborate with the UN to identify multifaceted challenges and address their root causes in a coherent and holistic manner.

At the heart of our mission as a facilitator is our role as an elected member of the Security Council for the 2024-25 term.

Our focus is on peacekeeping and peacebuilding, advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, and addressing the complex relationship between climate and security.

However, we must also face the dysfunctions that have hampered the Council's effectiveness.

It is increasingly difficult to justify the current structure when a permanent member continues its war of aggression on its neighbor, challenging the fundamental tenets of the UN Charter it is tasked with upholding. The misuse of its right to veto is putting deadlocks on important and urgent work.

As we seek to find practical solutions by actively building common ground amongst the diverging views of the Council members, we will also work with all UN Member states to achieve a comprehensive Security Council reform in the Intergovernmental Negotiations.

Expanding elected membership under equitable geographical distribution and through regular elections will contribute to a more democratic, effective, transparent, representative and accountable Council. The compromise proposal of longer-term re-electable seats deserves due attention in this regard.

The Republic of Korea will also actively address the surging demand for humanitarian aid in the midst of ongoing conflicts.

This year, the Republic of Korea has committed \$200 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine. And we also plan to provide \$100 million to tackle humanitarian crises by this year's end, including \$30 million for civilians affected by the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

Sadly, conflict in the Middle East is now being further escalated, especially in the Israel-Lebanon border. The Republic of Korea joins the U.S., France and many others in urging the parties to pause their fighting and instead give diplomacy a chance to succeed.

Second, the Republic of Korea will play a role as a supporter for the Global South in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and take climate actions.

As the first country to transition from an aid recipient to a donor nation, we firmly believe that we can and should be the tide that lifts other boats.

This philosophy underpins our approach to official development assistance (ODA) which has grown by 30% this year from last year, and quadrupled since 2010.

With only six years left to meet the SDGs and only 17% of these goals on track, we also wish to be smart about how our ODA is put to use, however fast-growing it is.

Our initiative to serve as a Green Ladder through our Green ODA demonstrates the commitment to tackle the nexus of climate change and the SDGs.

Recently, the Republic of Korea has committed an additional \$300 million to the Green Climate Fund, \$7 million to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage and has plans to continue expanding its Green ODA.

But financial support is only part of the equation.

We are buttressing our funding with intangible support by sharing our unique developmental know-how and by building wider and more sustained partnerships.

The inaugural ‘Korea-Pacific Islands Summit’ held last year as well as the first-ever ‘Korea-Africa Summit’ held in June this year were landmark events which highlighted our commitment to deepening mutually enriching partnerships with these regions.

At the June Korea-Africa Summit, we pledged to increase our ODA to Africa up to \$10 billion by 2030 and to collaboratively address global challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, and supply chain disruptions.

We put a particular focus on empowering the youths of Africa, the youngest continent in the world, to drive sustainable development through initiatives like Tech4Africa.

Next year, we plan to organize the inaugural Korea-Central Asia Summit where sustainable development will again take center stage.

All of this would only be a half-measure without Korea's own green transition. We will remain fully committed to Carbon-Free Energy (CFE) Initiative.

Third, the Republic of Korea will act as an initiator in the global efforts to install new norms and governance for human dignity and well-being.

The exponential growth of technology, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), has not only opened new frontiers but also poses potential risks to human rights and dignity. Meeting such a new challenge requires new norms and governance fit for our time.

To that end, my President, standing in this very hall last year, pledged to lead the global discussions on AI governance, and we have since spearheaded efforts to establish frameworks that ensure AI is developed and used in service of humanity.

The *Seoul Declaration for Safe, Innovative and Inclusive AI*, adopted during the AI Seoul Summit in May, marked a significant milestone in building the norms for civilian AI.

The adoption of *Blueprint for Action* during the 2nd Summit on Responsible AI in the Military Domain earlier this month in Seoul further laid the groundwork for norms for military use of AI.

We are also dedicated to addressing cyber threats and promoting an open, free, and safe cyberspace that respects human rights.

Leveraging its expertise in cybersecurity, the Republic of Korea has actively participated in global efforts to establish comprehensive norms, including the UN Convention against Cybercrime.

Our work extends to the UN Security Council where as an elected member, the Republic of Korea is helping to lay a solid foundation for the Council's effective and agile response to cybersecurity issues.

Another area of concern is plastic pollution, a global crisis that threatens both ecosystems and human health.

The Republic of Korea will host the 5th and the last session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution in Busan in November this year where we hope to work with the UN members to reach a binding agreement to end this pollution.

(August 15th Unification Doctrine)

Mr. President,

The heartbreaking tragedy is that just miles from Seoul, we find cynicism at its bleakest.

North Korea continues to pose threats to peace and security on the Korean peninsula and beyond with its ongoing development of nuclear and missile capabilities as shown by their recent disclosure of uranium enrichment facility as well as provocations that have stooped down to despicable levels such as sending trash balloons into the South.

Moreover, North Korea has been engaged in military cooperation with Russia providing it with missiles and millions of ammunitions. It is indeed deplorable that Russia, a permanent Security Council member and one of the founding states for the non-proliferation regime, is engaging in illegal arms trade with North Korea and, in April of this year, vetoed the extension of the mandate of the 'Panel of Experts' on sanctions against North Korea which had been functioning effectively for the past 15 years.

The heart of the matter is that North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and egregious human rights abuses are two sides of the same coin.

North Korea is only able to develop these weapons of mass destruction with impunity by repressing the human rights of its people and diverting scarce resources from its starving populace.

What Pyongyang offers is not a vision but a cold and self-serving calculus, a calculus that only sees twin deficits persisting indefinitely: a deficit of peace on the peninsula and a deficit of freedom in North Korea.

Mr. President,

The ‘August 15 Unification Doctrine,’ unveiled by President Yoon Suk Yeol last month, presents a vision of a “unified Korean Peninsula that is free, peaceful, and prosperous.”

Recognizing that achieving sustainable peace is an unfinished task on the peninsula, we firmly believe that the road to peace runs through the expansion of freedom and through the unification of Korean Peninsula. And this peace will contribute to global peace and security.

Under this vision, freedom which has underpinned the Republic of Korea’s independence, growth, and prosperity will at last be fully unlocked in the North, restoring the human rights of each and every Korean.

Achieving this vision requires the international community to advocate the freedom and human rights of North Koreans who have no voice.

The Republic of Korea is committed to working together with the international community to steer North Korea towards making the right decisions.

Mr. President,

Nearly 75 years ago, founders of the United Nations stood together, bound by faith in multilateralism to defend freedom and sovereignty and uphold the UN Charter.

As we approach the 80th session of the General Assembly next year, we must recommit ourselves to the principles that brought us together.

Multilateralism is not an outdated concept – it is the only path forward.

To stand idle in the face of today's challenges would be to abandon both the vulnerable of today and the generations of tomorrow. Thank you. /END/