

**Mr President of the General Assembly,
Mr Secretary General,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honour and privilege to address you from this place. It's the first time for me in my capacity as President of Slovakia.

The United Nations Organization – which we helped to found with our brotherly Czech nation under Czechoslovakia's flag – has been here for almost eight decades.

We could spend hours discussing its imperfections or flaws. We have a legitimate right to ask how the UN delivers on its core mission. That is – maintaining peace, guaranteeing international law and protecting human rights. And most importantly – why it fails to do so quite often.

Despite all its faults and failures, the UN is the only truly global forum we have. It is the backbone of the world order based on rules and international law. The cornerstone of the world as we know it. The UN is a vital international ecosystem for most countries in the world, including Slovakia.

The sovereignty of the majority is – to a great extent – based on our ability to cooperate, show solidarity, and look for points where our often different interests meet.

It builds on our readiness to reach a compromise and respect our diversity based on shared universal values, rules and obligations.

Especially in today's uncertain times, it is a powerful pillar of sovereignty. Just like its classic features – territorial integrity or independence of action. The way we cooperate tells a story about us. Where do we belong? What do we reach for? And eventually – who we are – as people, community, humanity.

Our joint confidence in the existing system of international relations – with the UN as its key element – is what separates us from chaos and arbitrariness. In other words – from war and violence. There are countries and entities among us that believe that the absence of rules will be the breeding ground for their future success.

They believe that the force is above the law. In reality – however – the collapse of a rules-based system would eventually get back at those who desire it the most today.

In Slovakia's immediate vicinity – in Ukraine – a war has been going on for almost 1,000 days already. As a result of Russia's aggression, which violated such basic principles of international law as sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is worth reminding that our neighbour – Ukraine – legitimately defends its country and its people according to international law – including the UN Charter.

Every day, this war continues to destroy the lives, the infrastructure and the future of Ukrainian men and women. It is of no good to Russia's people either as they die too. The war has come to them as well. The escalation grows. It is high time to start looking for a peaceful, sustainable and just end to this conflict – based on the principles of international law and the UN Charter.

Looking at the world's geography, for parts of the globe, it might seem like a local – and by far not the only serious – conflict the world faces today. Let us recall the suffering of the people in Gaza after the horrific

terrorist attack by Hamas against Israel and the casualties on both sides. Or the state collapses in Haiti or Sudan – both followed by humanitarian disasters. However – from the international community's point of view – what we see here is an existential struggle for the nature and future of international law and adherence to agreed rules.

None of us today can think that the UN can fully prevent all wars and conflicts. In Ukraine, the Middle East, Africa or elsewhere. The reason – however – isn't some kind of alleged dysfunction of the organization and its agencies. It is rather the lack of joint political will in its highest body – the Security Council. On the other hand – it's a fact that the UN was born with powerful and exclusive checks without effective balances.

For years, there has been a general understanding that the UN needs a deep reform. Slovakia stands ready to continue assisting this legitimate effort.

We see that we must rather look for effective prevention, management and eventually solutions to conflicts within local or continental alliances.

The role of the UN remains central but the need for partnerships with regional organizations is growing. For us in Europe, it is NATO and the EU. This is the only way for the UN – with its foundations laid in the last century – to withstand the threats and challenges of the current one.

I don't find it appropriate or useful to divide the world into 'Global North' and 'Global South', East or West. Much more important is to look at who respects our shared rules and obligations and who doesn't. Who is interested in making them stronger and acting by them. And who is rather undermining them or applying double standards.

All of us are far from perfect. However, it fills me with hope that those of us who respect our shared values and rules – form the vast majority here. And those who despise, systematically ignore, harm or apply these rules only when it comes in handy – are only a few.

It's often those who try to take apart not only the rules but also the meaning of words. In the flood of information and misinformation that we face today – we must not renounce the truth.

The reverse is still the reverse, not the face. A lie is just a lie, not a fact of an alternate reality. Aggression is no defence. Occupation is no 'brotherly help', liberation or some mythical togetherness. Likewise, war remains war, no matter what euphemism they call it.

We must not forget that words and those who speak them – including traditional and social media – remain the most powerful weapons – determiners of good and evil. They can both fortify or disrupt unity and trust in our societies and communities. They can promote tolerance or spread hatred.

It is of utter importance that we speak out against those who abuse words by giving them alternate or even opposite meanings. Promoting information integrity should be high on our priority list.

The global debate on climate change is a good example proving we can do this. The denying of climate change and its evidence by renowned scientific teams around the world – quite common until recently – is in the face of increasingly destructive climate conditions and disasters now obscure even in the most marginal opinion groups.

Our emissions are already beyond the imaginary line of our Paris Commitments, before which we could still significantly slow down what we humanity have caused through our activities. Blaming each other won't help either. We'd better do what we can. Let's invest part of our personal and political activity into what is already happening with our climate. Mitigating the consequences of hurricanes, floods and extinguishing fires – both figuratively and unfortunately also literally – is today's urgent climate agenda.

Protection of freedom, human rights and human dignity for everyone, efforts to reduce poverty, strengthening food security, upgrading health, hygiene and vaccination standards, environmental protection, preservation of ecosystems and diversity. Here – along with the climate change mitigation – I see a huge area of action for the UN and its specialized agencies too.

Practical and well-directed policies. Coordination of different national development and assistance programmes into regional synergies and successes. As well as comprehensive and expert evaluation of green transition efforts.

That is what I expect from the UN of today.

I am proud that Slovakia belongs – not only in Europe but also globally – to the leaders in compliance with joint climate commitments.

I believe the UN should also pay much more attention to the technological and digital aspects of our lives. Today, it's almost equally important as our physical identities. What I have in mind is no global regulation. That is a task for regional actors. I rather think of the widest possible involvement of new technologies into everything that the UN has been working on. My point is that the whole world should more evenly benefit from technological progress. It should become one of the main engines of social progress and a way to level differences and promote gender equality. All of this is also a part of the basic mission of the UN.

Another pressing problem in front of many countries and the entire international community is migration. It is a phenomenon that divides us rather than unites us. An agenda on which elections are won or lost today.

However, we should never forget that most of our ancestors across Europe were refugees too – when they fled before war, poverty or persecution during Nazism or communism.

There is no magic formula for addressing illegal migration. It is – however – clear that many aspects of migration need clear rules, transparent procedures and effective policies. Measures, which will help the source, transit as well as target countries. It is also legitimate to appropriately address all security risks that the – in particular the illegal – migration brings.

But what we need in the first place is a calm, pragmatic and realistic dialogue leading to the cooperation of all concerned parties – which not only deals with the consequences but – above all – with the causes of illegal migration as well as those who aid it and profit from it.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovakia has long-term been an active member of the UN. In the spirit of all the issues, priorities and challenges that I mentioned today – Slovakia is preparing as a candidate for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council in 2028 and 2029. Our diplomats and experts are sitting in executive boards of several specialized UN agencies.

The roots of Czechoslovak – and today's Slovak diplomacy – are closely linked with international cooperation. Names like Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Štefan Osuský, Ivan Krno or Ján Papánek are well-known in the diplomatic community and some of them left a strong footprint here in the UN corridors too.

The latter one – Ján Papánek – was Czechoslovakia's delegate at the San Francisco Conference and was one of the 14 people who formulated the final text of the Charter that gave birth to this organization. All these prominent Slovak diplomats had one thing in common – they all were true and convinced multilateralists.

And it is to multilateralism that we – to a large extent – owe our modern statehood and identity. It's therefore up to us – the leaders of this world – to stress in communication to our citizens that the building blocks and rules of the international community – which we have been laying together for almost eight decades since 1945 – have no sustainable alternative.

It is our task to say and repeat that we must not bring them down but – on the contrary – fix and bolster them.

Multilateralism – just like the world around us – is complex and has many – diverse and often opposing – layers. It requires a lot of patience and it often brings frustration or bitterness.

However – it's also the most precious generational wealth that we can relay to our posterity. It's up to us in what condition and how well or ill-prepared for the future we'll jointly pass it on.

Thank you.