

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

—

ADDRESS TO THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 24 September 2024, 9:00 a.m.

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our world is in a whirlwind.

We are in an era of epic transformation – facing challenges unlike any we have ever seen – challenges that demand global solutions.

Yet geo-political divisions keep deepening. The planet keeps heating. Wars rage with no clue how they will end.

And nuclear posturing and new weapons cast a dark shadow.

We are edging towards the unimaginable – a powder keg that risks engulfing the world.

Meanwhile, 2024 is the year that half of humanity goes to the polls – and all of humanity will be affected.

I stand before you in this whirlwind convinced of two overriding truths.

First, the state of our world is unsustainable.

We can't go on like this.

And second, the challenges we face are solvable.

But that requires us to make sure the mechanisms of international problem-solving actually solve problems.

The Summit of the Future is a first step, but we have a long way to go.

Getting there requires confronting three major drivers of unsustainability.

A world of impunity – where violations and abuses threaten the very foundation of international law and the UN Charter.

A world of inequality – where injustices and grievances threaten to undermine countries or even push them over the edge.

And a world of uncertainty – where unmanaged global risks threaten our future in unknowable ways.

These worlds of impunity, inequality and uncertainty are connected and colliding.

Excellencies,

The level of impunity in the world is politically indefensible and morally intolerable.

Today, a growing number of governments and others feel entitled to a “get out of jail free” card.

They can trample international law.

They can violate the United Nations Charter.

They can turn a blind eye to international human rights conventions or the decisions of international courts.

They can thumb their nose at international humanitarian law.

They can invade another country, lay waste to whole societies, or utterly disregard the welfare of their own people.

And nothing will happen.

We see this age of impunity everywhere -- in the Middle East, in the heart of Europe, in the Horn of Africa, and beyond.

The war in Ukraine is spreading with no signs of letting up.

Civilians are paying the price – in rising death tolls and shattered lives and communities.

It is time for a just peace based on the UN Charter, international law and UN resolutions.

Meanwhile, Gaza is a non-stop nightmare that threatens to take the entire region with it.

Look no further than Lebanon.

We should all be alarmed by the escalation.

Lebanon is at the brink.

The people of Lebanon – the people of Israel – and the people of the world cannot afford Lebanon to become another Gaza.

Let's be clear.

Nothing can justify the abhorrent acts of terror committed by Hamas on October 7th, or the taking of hostages – both of which I have repeatedly condemned.

And nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

The speed and scale of the killing and destruction in Gaza are unlike anything in my years as Secretary-General.

More than 200 of our own staff have been killed, many with their families.

And yet the women and men of the United Nations continue to deliver.

I know you join me in paying a special tribute to UNRWA and all humanitarians in Gaza.

The international community must mobilize for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and the beginning of an irreversible process towards a two-State solution.

For those who go on undermining that goal with more settlements, more landgrabs, more incitement -- I ask:

What is the alternative?

How could the world accept a one-state future that includes such a large number of Palestinians without any freedom, rights or dignity?

In Sudan, a brutal power struggle has unleashed horrific violence -- including widespread rape and sexual assaults.

A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding as famine spreads. Yet outside powers continue to interfere with no unified approach to finding peace.

In the Sahel, the dramatic and rapid expansion of the terrorist threat requires a joint approach rooted in solidarity - but regional and international cooperation have broken down.

From Myanmar to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Haiti to Yemen and beyond – we continue to see appalling levels of violence and human suffering in the face of a chronic failure to find solutions.

Meanwhile our peacekeeping missions are too often operating in areas where there is no peace to keep.

Instability in many places around the world is a by-product of instability in power relations and geo-political divides.

For all its perils, the Cold War had rules.

There were hot lines, red lines and guard rails.

It can feel as though we don't have that today.

Nor do we have a unipolar world.

We are moving to a multipolar world, but we are not there yet.

We are in a purgatory of polarity.

And in this purgatory, more and more countries are filling the spaces of geopolitical divides, doing whatever they want with no accountability.

That is why it is more important than ever to reaffirm the Charter, to respect international law, to support and implement decisions of international courts, and to reinforce human rights.

Anywhere and everywhere.

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

L'augmentation des inégalités est un deuxième facteur de l'insoutenabilité et une tache sur notre conscience collective.

L'inégalité n'est pas une question technique ou bureaucratique.

Au fond, l'inégalité est une question de pouvoir, aux racines historiques.

Les conflits, les bouleversements climatiques et la crise du coût de la vie étendent ces racines plus profondément encore.

Dans le même temps, le monde peine encore à se relever de la flambée des inégalités engendrée par la pandémie.

Si l'on regarde les 75 pays les plus pauvres du monde, un tiers d'entre eux se trouve aujourd'hui dans une situation pire qu'il y a cinq ans.

Au cours de la même période, les cinq hommes les plus riches de planète ont plus que doublé leurs fortunes.

Et un pour cent des habitants de la planète détient 43 % de l'ensemble des avoirs financiers mondiaux.

Au niveau national, certains gouvernements décuplent les inégalités en accordant des cadeaux fiscaux massifs aux entreprises et aux ultra-riches — au détriment des investissements dans la santé, l'éducation et la protection sociale.

Et personne n'est plus lésé que les femmes et les filles du monde entier.

Excellences,

La discrimination et les abus généralisés fondés sur le genre constituent l'inégalité la plus répandue dans toutes les sociétés.

Chaque jour, il semble que nous soyons confrontés à de nouveaux cas révoltants de féminicides, de violences fondées sur le genre et de viols collectifs – en temps de paix comme en tant qu'arme de guerre.

Dans certains pays, les lois sont utilisées pour menacer la santé et les droits reproductifs.

Et en Afghanistan, les lois sont utilisées pour entériner l'oppression systématique des femmes et des filles.

Et je suis désolé de constater que, malgré des années de beaux discours, l'inégalité de genre se manifeste, aujourd'hui encore, pleinement dans cette enceinte.

Moins de 10 pour cent des intervenants au Débat général de cette semaine sont des femmes.

C'est inacceptable, surtout quand on sait que l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes contribue à la paix, au développement durable, à l'action climatique et bien plus encore.

C'est précisément pour cela nous avons pris des mesures spécifiques pour atteindre la parité hommes-femmes parmi les hauts responsables de l'Organisation des Nations Unies.

C'est faisable.

J'exhorte les institutions politiques et économiques du monde dominées par les hommes à le faire.

Excellences,

Les inégalités mondiales se reflètent et se renforcent jusque dans nos propres organisations internationales.

Le Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies a été conçu par les vainqueurs de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

À l'époque, la majeure partie du continent africain était encore sous domination coloniale.

À ce jour, l'Afrique n'a toujours aucun siège permanent au sein de la principale instance de paix du monde.

Un changement s'impose.

Il en va de même pour l'architecture financière mondiale, mise en place il y a 80 ans.

Je félicite les dirigeants de la Banque mondiale et du Fonds monétaire international pour les mesures importantes qu'ils ont entrepris.

Mais comme le souligne le Pacte pour l'avenir, la lutte contre les inégalités exige une accélération de la réforme de l'architecture financière internationale.

Au cours des huit dernières décennies, l'économie mondiale s'est développée et transformée.

Les institutions de Bretton Woods n'ont pas suivi le rythme.

Elles ne sont plus en mesure de fournir un filet de sécurité mondial, ni offrir aux pays en développement le niveau de soutien dont ils ont tant besoin.

Dans les pays les plus pauvres du monde, le coût des intérêts de la dette dépasse, en moyenne, le coût des investissements dans l'éducation, la santé et les infrastructures publiques réunis.

Et à l'échelle du monde, plus de 80 % des cibles des Objectifs de développement durable ne sont pas en bonne voie.

Excelencias,

Volver al camino correcto requiere un aumento de financiamiento para la Agenda 2030 y el Acuerdo de París.

Esto implica que los países del G20 lideren un Estímulo para los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible de 500.000 millones de dólares al año.

Implica reformas para aumentar sustancialmente la capacidad de préstamo de los Bancos Multilaterales de Desarrollo – y permitirles ampliar masivamente la financiación asequible a largo plazo para el clima y el desarrollo.

Implica ampliar la financiación de contingencia mediante el reciclaje de los Derechos Especiales de Giro.

E implica promover una reestructuración de la deuda a largo plazo.
Excelencias,

No me hago ilusiones sobre las barreras a la reforma del sistema multilateral.

Los que tienen poder político y económico, y los que creen tenerlo, son siempre reacios al cambio.

Pero el statu quo ya está agotando su poder.

Sin reformas, la fragmentación es inevitable, y las instituciones globales perderán legitimidad, credibilidad y eficacia.

Excellencies,

The third driver of our unsustainable world is uncertainty.

The ground is shifting under our feet.

Anxiety levels are off the charts.

And young people, in particular, are counting on us and seeking solutions.

Uncertainty is compounded by two existential threats – the climate crisis and the rapid advance of technology -- in particular, Artificial Intelligence.

Excellencies,

We are in a climate meltdown.

Extreme temperatures, raging fires, droughts, and epic floods are not natural disasters.

They are human disasters -- increasingly fueled by fossil fuels.

No country is spared. But the poorest and most vulnerable are hardest hit.

Climate hazards are blowing a hole through the budgets of many African countries, costing up to five per cent of GDP – every year.

And this is just the start.

We are on course to careen past the global limit of a 1.5 degree temperature rise.

But as the problem gets worse, solutions are getting better.

Renewable prices are plummeting, roll-out is accelerating, and lives are being transformed by affordable, accessible clean energy.

Renewables don't just generate power. They generate jobs, wealth, energy security and a path out of poverty for millions.

Developing countries cannot be plundered in that journey.

Our Panel on Critical Minerals has recommended fair and sustainable ways to meet global demand for these resources, which are essential to the renewables revolution.

Excellencies,

A future without fossil fuels is certain. A fair and fast transition is not.

That is in your hands.

By next year, every country must produce an ambitious new national climate action plan – or Nationally Determined Contributions.

These must bring national energy strategies, sustainable development priorities, and climate ambitions together.

They must align with the 1.5 degree limit, cover the whole economy, and contribute to every one of the COP28 energy transition targets.

An International Energy Agency report released today breaks this down.

By 2035, on average, advanced economies must slash energy emissions 80 per cent, and emerging markets 65 per cent.

The G20 is responsible for 80 per cent of total emissions.

They must lead the charge – keeping with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities in the light of different national circumstances.

But this must be a joint effort -- pooling resources, scientific capacities and proven and affordable technologies.

I'm honoured to be working closely with President Lula of Brazil – who is both G20 Chair and COP30 host – to secure maximum ambition, acceleration and cooperation.

Finance is essential.

COP29 is around the corner.

It must deliver a significant new finance goal.

We also need a Loss and Damage Fund that meets the scale of the challenge – and developed countries meeting their adaptation finance promises.

And we must finally flip the script on a crazy situation:

We continue to reward polluters to wreck our planet.

The fossil fuel industry continues to pocket massive profits and subsidies, while everyday people bear the costs of climate catastrophe – from rising insurance premiums to lost livelihoods.

I call on G20 countries to shift money from fossil fuel subsidies and investments to a just energy transition;

To put an effective price on carbon;

And to implement new and innovative sources of financing – including solidarity levies on fossil fuel extraction – through legally-binding, transparent mechanisms.

All by next year.

Those who shoulder the blame must foot the bill.

Polluters must pay.

Excellencies,

The rapid rise of new technologies poses another unpredictable existential risk.

Artificial Intelligence will change virtually everything we know -- from work, education and communication, to culture and politics.

We know AI is rapidly advancing, but where is it taking us:

To more freedom – or more conflict?

To a more sustainable world – or greater inequality?

To being better informed – or easier to manipulate?

A handful of companies and even individuals have already amassed enormous power over the development of AI – with little accountability or oversight.

Without a global approach to its management, artificial intelligence could lead to artificial divisions across the board – a Great Fracture with two internets, two markets, two economies – with every country forced to pick a side, and enormous consequences for all.

The United Nations is the universal platform for dialogue and consensus.

It is uniquely placed to promote cooperation on AI – based on the values of the Charter and international law.

The global debate happens here, or it does not happen.

I welcome important first steps.

Two resolutions in the General Assembly, the Global Digital Compact, and the recommendations of the High-Level Body on AI can lay the foundations for inclusive governance of AI.

Let's move forward together to make AI a force for good.

Excellencies,

Nothing lasts forever.

But a feature of human life is that it appears otherwise.

The current order always feels fixed.

Until it is not.

Across human history, we see empires rising and falling; old certainties crumbling; tectonic shifts in global affairs.

Today our course is unsustainable.

It is in all our interests to manage the epic transformations underway; to choose the future we want and guide our world towards it.

Many have said that the differences and divisions today are just too great.

That it is impossible for us to come together for the common good.

You proved that's not true.

The Summit of the Future showed that with a spirit of dialogue and compromise, we can join forces to steer our world to a more sustainable path.

It is not the end.

It is a start of a journey, a compass in the whirlwind.

Let's keep going.

Let's move our world towards less impunity and more accountability less inequality and more justice ... less uncertainty and more opportunity.

The people of the world are looking to us – and succeeding generations will look back on us.

Let them find us on the side of the United Nations Charter ... on the side of our shared values and principles ... and on the right side of history.

Thank you.