



Statement by Mr Bart De Wever, Prime Minister of Belgium,
delivered at the General Assembly, Penary session,
New York, 25 September 2025

Madam President,
Esteemed colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is the first time that I stand before you. I'm 54 years old, which means that I was a teenager in the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan was President of this great country. A man that I admired and still admire.

Today I'm nostalgic of that time because then I truly believed that the Western world was bound together by shared values and mutual respect. I also believed that our values would eventually rule the entire world.

Today we are reminded of the *Melian Dialogue* of the Greek historian Thucydides.

He described how envoys from Athens forced the small, neutral island of Melos to choose sides in the Peloponnesian War.

If Melos refused, Athens would destroy it.

Thucydides captured the brutal logic of power in a single sentence:

“The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must.”



He may have been right about human nature. But that is not the world we want to live in today.

Civilisation means striving to be better than our basic instincts, to rise above them.

The United Nations was born out of the most destructive war in human history to embody precisely that aspiration.

And yet today, international organisations are under pressure. International law is under pressure. Respect for sovereignty is under pressure. Geopolitics often boil down to sheer ego-politics.

And I regret this deeply.

That is why I stand before you today to advocate for a world anchored in mutual respect.

A world of free and fair trade.

A world of strong partnerships, respect and cooperation.

A world based on international law.

A world that tackles climate change.

A world of peace, prosperity, and progress.



The United Nations remain crucial in pursuing that ambition. The United Nations are far from perfect, and this is why we support the UN80 reform agenda.

Because the challenges we face, are immense.

I will highlight two domains in which we urgently need to move forward: our security and our prosperity.

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First, security.

All who cherish freedom must work to build resilient and vigilant societies.

We face new forms of imperialism, new military threats, and violent conflicts that destabilise entire regions.

This is not the path we choose. But neither can we afford to be naïve.

Those who wish for peace must be prepared to defend it. That is why we stand firmly with Ukraine.

We must erect a barrier against those who look at us the way the Athenians looked at Melos.



Belgium is therefore assuming its full responsibility, investing more in defence. Together with our European partners, we are striving for greater integration of our armed forces and defence industry.

At the same time, we must strengthen ties with all countries committed to peace and stability.

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We must also confront the rise of international organised crime.

Criminals know no borders.

Criminal networks exploit the gaps between police forces and legal systems.

They fuel terrorism, human trafficking, and the illegal arms trade.

But there is hope. Across Europe and in Latin America, I have witnessed a new willingness to deepen cooperation. I am convinced many African and Asian countries struggle with the same problems.

Together, we can make our societies open for business but closed for crime.

Because the security of our citizens must always remain our first responsibility.

That is the first great challenge we must tackle.



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Another major challenge we face, is to ensure as much prosperity as possible for as many people as possible.

The world today is, once again, gripped by protectionism.

And yet, the evidence of history is clear. For over two centuries, free and fair trade has been the only true engine of progress.

It has decimated extreme poverty. It has dramatically increased life expectancy. It has enabled medical breakthroughs that defeated once-devastating diseases.

Free and fair trade is the way forward.

We must nurture it and defend it.

We must tear down trade barriers. We must allow our economies to grow across borders. We must stimulate productivity, strengthen labour markets, and invest in innovation.

In short: we must create prosperity that is globally shared.

And let us remember: prosperity engenders peace. Prosperity builds trust.

Belgium stands ready to be your partner in this endeavour.

Belgium is — and will always remain — open for business.



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Madam President, distinguished delegates,

Let us not succumb to the harsh logic of Thucydides. Let us prove that the destiny of humankind is not to dominate or to suffer, but to cooperate and to prosper.

This should remain the mission of the United Nations.

Thank you.