

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by President of the Republic of Finland, Alexander Stubb, at the General Debate of the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 24 September 2025

Madam President, Mr Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In its simplest form, foreign policy is based on three pillars: values, interests, and power.

I come from a relatively small country, Finland. Our toolkit is mainly about values and interests. Power – hard and soft – is a luxury of bigger players.

The power of a smaller country arises from its capacity to cooperate with others. Smart diplomacy is what gives a smaller player at least relative influence.

The UN is a case in point. Big players have power through their permanent membership in the Security Council, but we the smaller players can influence the ebb and flow of international relations by being active in the corridors of diplomacy.

Most of the speeches here today have highlighted the fact that the world order, balance and dynamics are changing, much like they did after World War II when the UN was founded.

I think the post-Cold War order is over, but we do not yet know what the new order will look like. It will take at least five to ten years for things to settle.

My message today is straightforward. Regardless of size, each and every member state of the UN has agency – a say in how the new world order will look like. It is important that we all use this power wisely and responsibly.

I fully appreciate that our interests differ – depending on our geographical location, history, state of development or culture. But fundamental values are something we should all share. We have commonly defined some of the most essential of them in the UN Charter.

Today, I want to do two things: analyse where we are and give my proposals on what we might want to do together.

To understand what is currently happening in the world, I would like to raise three different yet related developments.

Firstly, it seems to me that there is a growing tension between those who promote multilateralism - an order based on the rule of law - and those that speak the language of multipolarity or transactionalism.

I can understand the temptation and the rationale of the proponents of multipolarity or transactionalism.

But can they solve the world's biggest challenges, such as climate change or sustainable development?

Today, I see many states, both big and small, pursuing transactional or multivectoral foreign policies. In essence, their aim is to diversify their relations with multiple actors rather than aligning with any one bloc.

This can be opportunistic. But it may also be justified and reasonable. This depends on their practical choices.

A transactional or multivectoral foreign policy is dominated by interests. Interests drive the practical choices of states, and this is entirely legitimate.

This kind of foreign policy is based on a realistic understanding of power. Power defines the limits of what is possible for each state.

However, values should underpin everything we do. Even a transactional or multivectoral foreign policy should rest on a core of fundamental values. Without them, foreign policy will ultimately run into a wall.

If you set aside values for unhindered pursuit of power and interests, you will eventually find before you the very same problems you wanted to overlook.

Secondly, the balance of power in the new world order is shifting towards South and East. Many countries, especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, are becoming or have become key players in determining the direction of the new world order. To put it simply, they have both agency and power.

They are an expanding economic force. Their demographic growth is inexorable. This will also turn them into a political and cultural force. It will yield them both hard power and soft power. And they will use it to promote their interests, as they should.

The 193 members of the United Nations do not have to agree on every minute detail of values, but we have to have a common understanding of the fundamentals. They include the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, the prohibition of the use of force, and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

These values are the building blocks of who we are and what we stand for as United Nations. The broad international community has, overwhelmingly, an interest in upholding them.

Russia has no right to continue its aggression against Ukraine. Israel has no right to violate international law in Palestine. States have no right to use Sudanese or Congolese territories to fight proxy wars for their economic or strategic self-interest.

I urge us all to heed this message of the international community and act accordingly. War is always a failure of humanity. It is a collective failure of our fundamental values.

Thirdly, I would like to say a few words about the state of the United Nations.

The UN was created to maintain and promote peace, stability, development and friendly relations among nations.

In order to achieve this, a balance between three elements was required. The power, at the highest level, was represented by the Security Council.

The interests of the wider membership were to be reconciled in the General Assembly. The values were enshrined in the Charter and consolidated as rules of international law.

Today, the UN is struggling to fulfil its central promise of delivering peace and stability. Countries have increasingly taken the liberty to break the rules of international law, and to use force to gain other peoples' territories and suppress other nations.

The United Nations of today does not sufficiently reflect the realities of the balance of power. All too often, it fails to serve as a forum for the coordination of interests. The values at its core are too often not respected in good faith.

We all want to have the freedom to make choices and a possibility to influence the world around us. Today, many countries are seeking answers in multipolarity or transactionalism. If the UN fails to deliver, this trend is accelerated.

So let me sum up this in terms of the three pillars of values, interests and power.

Our values can divide us. Fundamentally, however, they should unite us around the basic principles of humanity, the rule of law, and the prohibition of aggression.

Our interests differ, and it is only right that we promote them. However, our choices have consequences. Opportunism will eventually be forced to confront the problems it tried to ignore.

Power will constantly seek a new a balance. We must adapt to the change. Nevertheless, we should not allow the rise of hard power to blind us. The power of legitimacy, integrity and rules will remain strong.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Never before in history has humankind had such means and innovations at its disposal to solve the world's most pressing problems.

However, the current direction is wrong in many ways: there are more wars than at any time since World War II, the world is becoming increasingly divided, and so are our societies, and the measures to deal with climate change and sustainable development are lagging behind.

In different parts of the world, we are witnessing immense civilian suffering and blatant disrespect for humanitarian principles.

For me as a Finn, Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine not only reminds me of our past, but is directly linked to the security of the part of the world where I live.

On the one hand, there is aggression and a total disregard for civilian life, and an attempt to undermine the fundamental principles on which the international order based. On the other hand, there is a bastion of freedom that is defending its right to exist and to make its own choices.

The battle for what consequences we will draw from this aggression is not yet over.

Recently, there has been a serious attempt at a diplomatic solution of the war on the initiative of the United States.

There are no perfect solutions to wars. At the same time, we know that any decision made in these matters will have far-reaching consequences for Ukraine and beyond.

There can hardly be a stronger unifying interest among the UN's broad membership than our opposition to the wars of conquest. Aggression must not be rewarded. Accountability for the most serious international crimes must be pursued.

In the Middle East, civilians in Gaza are experiencing immense suffering. The deepening humanitarian crisis has reached unbearable levels and represents a failure of the international system. At the same time, Hamas continues to hold the hostages it has taken and many have already lost their lives.

An immediate ceasefire is needed in Gaza. Humanitarian aid must be granted safe and unhindered access. The hostages must be released.

I commend the efforts led by France and Saudi Arabia to advance the two-state solution.

The negotiations must meet the Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian right to self-determination, its legitimate aspiration for statehood and sovereignty. The occupation that began in 1967 must end, and all permanent status issues must be resolved. Correspondingly, the countries that have not recognised Israel must do so.

At the same time, the international community must support and strengthen the Palestinian Authority for it to govern the entire Palestinian territory effectively. This is the only viable option for achieving a two-state solution. A stable Palestine will also significantly benefit the security of Israel.

In many other parts of the world, conflicts are raging – causing immense suffering locally, instability regionally and reverberations globally.

We have witnessed particularly brutal violence in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, and Mali, among others. Civilian populations continue to face famine and displacement at a large scale.

I praise all those who, in good faith, continue to work for peace, despite the daunting task.

In June, a peace agreement was reached for the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The true test, like with all peace agreements, lies in its implementation. There is a humanitarian crisis of alarming proportions that compels all of us to respond.

Peace processes should not be transactional. They must be guided by international law. All countries and stakeholders in the region must be engaged and committed to achieve sustainable peace. The presence and involvement of the UN is essential.

I would also like to stress the crucial work carried out by journalists amid conflicts and in other difficult circumstances. Attacks on members of the media are unacceptable.

Media freedom is the basis for democracy. It is a prerequisite for an open society. The ability of the press to carry out its work is important for all of us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The composition of the UN still largely reflects the world of 1945. As the world has changed drastically, so should the decision-making at the UN.

Last year in this very hall, I argued for a reformed Security Council. A Council where currently underrepresented regions would have a stronger voice through permanent seats at the table.

The number of permanent members should be increased at the Security Council. At least, there should be two new seats for Asia, two for Africa and one for Latin America. No single state should have veto power. And, if a member of the Security Council violates the UN Charter, its voting rights should be suspended.

I believe that these changes at the top of the UN are necessary in order maintain the UN's central role in international relations.

At the same time, a more comprehensive reform of the UN is needed. I commend the Secretary-General for his UN80 initiative. I encourage him to take bold and ambitious action.

Finland strongly supports the UN and wants it to succeed. Therefore, we stress the need for true reform to enhance the organisation's credibility, relevance and efficiency. This will ensure that the UN can act.

The UN needs to focus its efforts on its most important goals: ending and preventing wars, protecting human rights, and acting as a catalyst for sustainable development.

We need to get the UN back to peace mediation. No other organisation can offer the legitimacy comparable to that of the UN. If the UN is absent, conflicts are resolved without it, which is not in our common interest. The UN is needed as a mediator, and the member states should support it in this endeavour.

Finland is strongly engaged in the work of the UN and will remain so. Therefore, we are also standing for election to the Security Council for the term from 2029 to 2030.

Should we be elected, Finland pledges to be a principled and pragmatic partner for peace. We are principled in our commitment to international law, with the Charter at its core. We are pragmatic in seeking solutions that truly advance international peace and security, recognising that progress is often incremental.

At the outset of my speech, I said that each and every one of us has agency – a say how the new world order will look like.

We want to be able to make our own choices and have an impact on the world around us.

Nelson Mandela saw truth and reconciliation as the only hope for nations that are bitterly divided. The same applies to relations between states.

We should learn from history, but always look to the future, bearing in mind that our decisions will shape it.

Thank you.