

# President Meloni's address to the 80th United Nations General Assembly

Wednesday 26 September 2025  
President of the Council of Ministers Giorgia Meloni's address to the 80th United Nations General Assembly.

[The following video is available in Italian only]

80<sup>a</sup> Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite, l'intervento del Presidente Meloni



President Baerbock, Secretary-General Guterres, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

We are living through a fast-moving and complex period in time that is rich in opportunities but also, perhaps above all, fraught with dangers. We are suspended between war and peace.

According to the Global Peace Index 2024, 56 armed conflicts are currently taking place around the world – the highest number since the Second World War.

In other words, we are living in a profoundly different world from the one in which the United Nations was founded. In 1945, 51 nations, which have since become almost all nations, decided to come together to create an international organisation whose primary purpose was to prevent war.

The question we must ask ourselves, eighty years on, as we look around us, is: have we succeeded? You all know the answer; it is in the headlines, and it is merciless.

Peace, dialogue and diplomacy no longer seem able to convince and win. The use of force is prevailing on too many occasions. The scenario we are facing is what Pope Francis described with remarkable effectiveness as a "third world war" fought "in pieces".

Among the main ongoing conflicts, there is of course the Russian Federation's large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine.

Three and a half years ago, on 24 February 2022, Moscow decided to attack Kyiv. I do not think there was enough reflection on the consequences of that choice and on a point which I consider fundamental: the Russian Federation, a permanent member of the Security Council, deliberately trampled on Article 2 of the UN Charter by violating the integrity and political independence of another sovereign State, intending to annex its territory. Still today, it is not showing willingness to seriously accept any invitation to sit down for peace talks.

As was to be expected, this deep wound inflicted on international law has triggered destabilising effects that go well beyond the borders where that war is being fought. The conflict in Ukraine has reignited, and caused to detonate, several other crisis hotbeds, while the United Nations has become even more disunited.

It is no coincidence that Hamas took advantage of the weakening of this architecture to launch its attack against Israel on 7 October 2023. The ferocity and brutality of that attack – the hunting down of defenceless civilians – drove Israel to what was, in principle, a legitimate reaction, because every State and every people has the right to defend itself.

However, a reaction to an aggression must always respect the principle of proportionality. This is true for individuals and is all the more true for States. Israel has crossed that line, with a large-scale war that is involving the Palestinian civilian population beyond measure. And it is by crossing that line that the Jewish state has ended up violating humanitarian norms, causing a slaughter of civilians. A choice that Italy has repeatedly described as unacceptable, and one that will lead us to vote in favour of some of the sanctions against Israel proposed by the European Commission.

However, we will not join those who place all the responsibility for what is happening in Gaza on Israel, for it was Hamas that started the war. It is Hamas that could bring Palestinians' suffering to an end, by immediately releasing all the hostages. It is Hamas that seems to want to prosper on the suffering of the people it claims to represent.

Israel must get out of the trap of this war. It must do so for the history of the Jewish people, for its democracy, for the innocent people and for the universal values of the free world of which it is part.

To bring a war to an end, concrete solutions are needed. For peace is not built with appeals alone, or with ideological proclamations welcomed by those who do not want peace at all; peace is built with patience, courage and reasonableness.

The children of Gaza, like those Italy is proudly welcoming and caring for in its hospitals, are seeking responses that can improve their situation, and this is what we are working on. Italy is present and will continue to stand with anyone ready to work on a serious plan for the release of the hostages, a permanent ceasefire, the exclusion of Hamas from any governing dynamics in Palestine, Israel's gradual withdrawal from Gaza and the international community's efforts in managing the post-ceasefire phase, until the two-state prospect is made a reality.

In this regard, we consider the proposals that the President of the United States has discussed with Arab countries over the last few hours to be very interesting, and we are of course ready to lend a hand.

We do not believe that Israel has the right to prevent a Palestinian State from being established in the future, or to build new settlements in the West Bank in order to stop this from happening. This is why we signed the New York Declaration on the two-State solution. This is Italy's long-standing position on the issue of Palestine, and it is a position that has never changed.

At the same time, we believe that a recognition of Palestine must have two essential preconditions: the release of all Israeli hostages and Hamas giving up any role whatsoever in the government of Palestine, because those who started the conflict cannot be rewarded.

This brings us back to the starting point: the rules. The force of law. In Ukraine, in the Middle East, in all situations in which war is dominant and reason seems lost.

Colleagues, we cannot escape the most important question, which is the reason why we are all here together today: is the architecture of the United Nations that we built 80 years ago up to the challenges that our era is now imposing on us?

It is not. Without institutions that function as they should, multilateralism, dialogue and diplomacy are just empty words. We must recognise our limits. We must recognise that a profound reform of the United Nations is necessary, and urgent. Not an ideological reform, but a pragmatic and realistic one that respects nations' sovereignty and is open to shared solutions. We need an agile, efficient institution that is able to swiftly respond to crises. Transparent in its mission and transparent in its costs. Able to minimise bureaucracy, waste and duplications.

The 'Glass Palace' must also be a 'Glass House'.

The reform Italy has in mind, starting with the Security Council, must respect the principles of equality, democracy, representativeness and responsibility. New hierarchies and new permanent seats are not what are needed, quite simply because they would not resolve the decision-making paralysis that has undermined this institution's credibility.

We are open to discussing this reform without any preconceptions, also based on the proposals that have been put forward by the Uniting for Consensus group, but we want a reform that serves to represent everyone better, not to represent a few more.

In order to be effective, it is not just institutions we need to reform, for we are facing a change of era, and this demands a profound revision of all the tools we have to govern relations between nations and defend the rights of individuals, including International Conventions.

I am referring, for example, to the conventions governing migration and asylum. These rules were established at a time when mass irregular migration did not exist and nor did human traffickers. These conventions are no longer current in this context and, when they are interpreted in an ideological and unidirectional way by politicised judges, they end up trampling on the law, rather than upholding it.

Together with other European States, we have raised this issue and intend to pursue it, not to lower the level of guarantees or rights, of course, but rather to build a system that is in step with our times and is able to safeguard basic human rights along with the sacred right of every nation to protect its citizens and borders, exercise its sovereignty and govern the issue of migration, which has an impact on people, especially the most vulnerable.

The international community must come together in fighting the phenomenon of human trafficking. As is the case for other international institutions such as the European Union, the United Nations cannot look the other way or end up protecting criminals in the name of supposed civil rights.

Likewise, the United Nations cannot hypocritically consider some human rights to be less worthy of protection than others. I am above all thinking of the denied value of religious freedom and the tens of millions of people across the world – the majority of whom Christian – who are persecuted and massacred because of their faith.

A new model for cooperation between nations is also needed, but building it requires humility, awareness and trust in the partner you have in front of you.

Italy is trying to do its part in this regard too, above all with its Mattei Plan for Africa. Over the last three years, we have launched our cooperation plan with Africa and extended its reach to include 14 nations.

We have built collaborations with the United Nations, the European Union and its Global Gateway, the G7, the African Union and the African Development Bank, international financial institutions and many bilateral partners, including the United Arab Emirates, whom I would like to thank.

This complementarity gave us the honour of co-organising the third United Nations Food Systems Summit together with Ethiopia in July this year, as well as the responsibility of playing an active part in the major 'Lobito Corridor' infrastructure project between Angola and Zambia and the possibility to build public-private partnerships that attract investments and ensure concrete results.

This is what is happening in Algeria, where we will recover over 36,000 hectares of desert to be used for agriculture, generating benefits for more than 600,000 people. This is what is happening with the opening of the AI Hub for Sustainable Development, which will involve hundreds of African start-ups in the development of artificial intelligence. This is also what is happening with the extension to eastern Africa of the Blue Raman cable to connect India to European economies via the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

Unlike other players, we do not have ulterior motives in Africa. We are not interested in exploiting the African continent for the extremely rich raw materials in its possession. We are instead interested in Africa prospering by processing its own resources, creating jobs and prospects for its best talents and being able to count on stable governments and dynamic and safe societies.

This path, however, has no choice but to address an issue that can be put off no longer: the debt of African nations.

Over the next ten years, Italy plans to convert the entire amount of debt for the economically least developed nations, based on World Bank criteria, and to reduce that of medium- and low-income nations by 50%. Over these ten years, the complete operation will enable us to convert over EUR 235 million of debt into development projects to be rolled out locally.

The Italian Government – in this Jubilee Year – places particular importance on this initiative, and we hope it can be an example for other nations too, because it is not just an economic issue but is also about justice, dignity and future.

Dear colleagues, thirty years of blind faith in globalisation are over; the repercussions of this were underestimated and today we are facing 'unexpected consequences', which actually weren't unexpected at all, with serious impacts for citizens, households and businesses. Everything hasn't gone fine, as we were promised.

And I have more news for you: things can go much worse unless we put a stop to unsustainable production models being created around tables, such as the 'green plans' that in Europe – and throughout the West - are leading to deindustrialisation way before decarbonisation.

Reconverting entire production sectors based on theories that do not take into account people's needs, and their financial resources, was a mistake that is causing suffering among the most vulnerable social groups and is making the middle class slide downwards, imposing irrational consumption choices.

Unsustainable environmentalism has almost destroyed Europe's automotive industry, caused problems in the United States, resulted in job losses, weighed down competitiveness and depleted know-how. The most paradoxical thing is that it has not improved the overall state of our planet's health.

This is obviously not about denying climate change; it is about affirming reason, which above all means technological neutrality and a gradual approach to reforms instead of ideological extremism. Respecting the environment while keeping man at its core. For it took centuries to build our systems, but it will only need a few decades to find ourselves back in an industrial desert. The only thing, as I have said many times, is that there is nothing green about a desert.

Colleagues, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

this year we are celebrating not only the 80th anniversary of this assembly, but also the 70th anniversary of Italy joining the United Nations. This dual anniversary places even more responsibility on us to remain true to the principles and founding values of this organisation.

We are aware that, to do this, we must be able to make the tools we have to defend those principles and values effective for our time, so that our actions can be more impactful and truly in line with our societies' needs.

The choice we have before us is simple: leave everything as it is and take refuge in the easy options, or show our citizens that we will not waste this historic opportunity – which this time, with its many challenges, has given us – to build a more just and safer world.

As Saint Francis, the most Italian of saints, after whom the city where this organisation was born is named, said: the tough battles are reserved only for those who have exemplary courage. I believe the time has come to show that courage.

Thank you.

*[Courtesy translation]*

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