



**United  
Nations**

**General Assembly of the United Nations**  
President of the 80th session

**Remarks by the President of the General Assembly,  
H.E. Ms. Annalena Baerbock,**

**Opening of the 80th General Debate  
Tuesday, 23 September 2025**

**[As Delivered]**

Eighty years.

Longer than the average human life.

This anniversary of the UN should have been a moment of celebration.

But this is not an ordinary year.

Just look at the state of our world, as the Secretary General described.

- Thousands of orphans in Gaza are wandering around the rubble eating sand, drinking contaminated water.
- Ninety-year-old women in Ukraine are hiding from drones, trapped in their homes instead of living their final years in peace.
- Children in Haiti, too afraid to walk to school, afraid they might be gunned down by gangs, like their friends.

And for every conflict and tragedy that seizes the headlines, there are so many more that are forgotten.

Lost to the news cycle.

Like women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo shielding their daughters from armed groups, fearful they might be raped.

And Rohingya children, spending their whole childhood in tattered tents.

Unable to remember what home looks like.

Faced with these realities, now is not the time to celebrate.

But to ask ourselves:

Where is the United Nations?

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

People out there in the world, watching us.

Clearly, we have to do better.

But what we should not allow, is to let cynics weaponize these failures.

To argue that our institution is a waste of money.

Outdated.

Irrelevant.

When the principles of the Charter are ignored, is it the UN that has failed?

When tanks rolled into Ukraine, was it because Article 2 of the Charter is not clear enough about sovereignty and territorial integrity?

When civilians, children are killed in Gaza, is it humanitarian law at fault for failing to protect them?

It is not the Charter which fails.

It's not the UN as an institution which fails.

The Charter, our Charter, is only as strong as Member States' willingness to uphold it.

And their willingness to hold to account those who violate it.

Excellencies,

Yes, our world is in pain.

Yes, we have failures.

But imagine how much worse it would be without the United Nations.

Would a single person be better off without it?

Without UNICEF, 26 million children would not have received an education.

Without the World Food Programme, nearly 125 million people would have lacked life-saving food assistance.

Without the World Health Organization over a billion vaccines would not have been supplied.

Sometimes we could have done more.

But we cannot let this dishearten us.

If we stopped doing the right thing, evil would prevail.

This 80<sup>th</sup> session is not about big celebrations.

It's about finding the resolve not to give up.

The resolve to be Better Together.

Just as our predecessors did eight decades ago.

This institution was born in a world on fire and desperate for reprieve.

750 million – nearly a third of humanity back then– still under colonial rule.

Two World Wars in a generation.

70 million dead.

The horrors of the Holocaust revealed to our collective shame.

This was a generation that knew almost nothing but suffering and despair.

The signing of the Charter in 1945 gave hope to millions.

Gave us a north star that guided our path from the ashes of war.

Helped guide nations from colonial rule into independent states.

Helped end apartheid.

Across the decades, the United Nations has been a compass pointing toward peace, humanity, and justice.

We have not always succeeded.

But the story of this institution is not a story of easy victories.

It is the story of falling and rising.

Of pulling ourselves and each other back up and trying harder.

We gather here for the eightieth time.

Not for empty celebration.

Not out of ritual.

Not to hear our own voices.

We gather to prove that this institution matters.

And through it, every nation represented here, no matter how big or how small, can summon again the strength and unity first shown in San Francisco, 80 years ago.

The courage and resolve of leaders who, even while some called them naïve, believed they could build a better world from the wreckage of the old.

They showed then, what true leadership is.

It is not about imposing your will.

Or putting others down.

True leadership is about lifting others up.

Not only out of altruism,

But for our mutual benefit.

And even out of our self-interest.

Because—as our founders, and every architect of peace since then has understood—helping others is what ultimately makes your own countries stronger.

Could any state have faced a global pandemic alone?

The virus did not have any passport.

We were only able to solve it at the end with the support of the World Health Organization.

The climate crisis does not stop at borders.

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions anywhere affect people everywhere.

Even the wealthiest cities in the world cannot shield themselves from wildfires.

And imagine, coming here by plane how safe would you feel to step into the next aeroplane if there were no International Civil Aviation Organization, which is responsible for setting safety regulations for 5 billion passengers each year?

How comfortable would you be with your children using the internet while AI is uncontrolled and unchecked.

As the lines between what is real and fake start to blur.

In this globalised, digitalised world, we work together—or we suffer alone.

Excellencies,

The theme of this milestone session and the High-Level Week is therefore Better Together: Eighty Years and More for Peace, Development, and Human Rights.

Will living up to that theme be easy?

No.

But this Hall was not built for the easy times.

It was built to come together to confront the hardest topics.

This session, this high-level week is about resolving differences.

We showed some of this yesterday already.

But even the house of dialogue and diplomacy needs a renovation.

That is why the UN80 initiative—and the wider reform process—are not luxuries but necessities.

We are literally now at a crossroads.

A make it or break it moment. Politically, financially.

We have to deliver a United Nations that is agile, cost-effective, and fit for purpose.

Member States have to give the Secretary-General, and this process their full support, because reform cannot stop in New York.

It must carry through to every capital.

That includes delivering the Pact for the Future and accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Again, this is not about charity.

It is about addressing the core purposes of this institution.

About strengthening our foundations across all three pillars.

Peace and security.

Human Rights.

And Sustainable development.

They are inseparable.

Leaving hundreds of millions trapped in extreme poverty, vulnerable to crisis, and denied their human rights is not only a moral failure.

It is a recipe for global unrest, terrorism, and a tragic waste of humanity's greatest resource: its people.

Put simply – without the SDGs, there cannot be lasting peace.

Excellencies,

Our future as an institution will also be shaped by the selection of the next Secretary-General.

And here we must pause and reflect.

In nearly eighty years, this Organisation has never chosen a woman for that role.

One might wonder how out of four billion potential candidates, there could not be found a single one.

Of course, the choice rests with Member States.

But those of you having been there yesterday celebrating Beijing: one strong female leader after the other, from all our continents.

Like 80 years ago, we are standing at a crossroads.

And it is up to us, to every single Member State, to live up to the same leadership as our predecessors did.

To act when action is needed.

To uphold the principles of our Charter.

To be better together.

To show the people around the world that this United Nations is there.

Today. Tomorrow. And for the next eight decades.

Because after all it's the life insurance for every country.