



Speech by Maria Malmer Stenergard

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Madam/Mister President, Your Excellencies,

Eighty years ago, nations came together. It was a bold act of faith. Faith in multilateralism, the rule of law and the shared responsibility to save future generations from the devastation of war.

But as we gather here, the world and our organisation, the United Nations, are facing the risk of failing.

Leaders of several nations are choosing conflict over cooperation. Around the world, we are witnessing grave violations of the rules and principles that we have all agreed to.

For too many, peace is fragile, justice abstract and dignity denied. There is so much wasted potential.

The UN was founded to curb aggression and the arbitrary exercise of power by the strong against the weak. That vision remains as valid today as it was then.

Madam/Mister President,

It is not only the UN that turns 80 this year. It happens to be 80 years since Astrid Lindgren published her first book about the strongest girl in the world: Pippi Longstocking, a strong-willed girl who believed everything was possible.

Pippi has inspired generations of children, especially girls, to believe that strength and independence are not confined by expectation or tradition.

“I have never tried that before, so I should definitely be able to do it.” Although not a direct quote, it captures the spirit of Pippi.

Let’s use the coincidence of anniversaries as a reminder that even in the face of unprecedented challenges, we must approach the impossible with boldness and resolve.

Madam/Mister President,

Sweden is a committed defender of international humanitarian law – principles that safeguard human dignity even in the darkest of times, and they must be upheld without exception.

We cannot be deterred by a few states’ disregard for our Charter. This is our time to act, and to defend these fundamental rules and principles, for us and for future generations.

We need an efficient UN that defends the right of every state, big or small, to uphold its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

We need a strong UN that helps Member States deliver on their commitments: to respect, protect and promote the human rights of every individual.

We need a focused UN. The UN must remain true to its core: securing peace, advancing human rights, driving sustainable development and providing humanitarian relief.

Madam/Mister President,

As a steadfast partner and major donor to the United Nations, Sweden remains committed to addressing global development challenges and to humanitarian efforts to provide protection and life-saving assistance.

Sweden is also a strong supporter of UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. We actively take part in the Peacebuilding Commission, we chair the Liberia Configuration and we have contributed substantially to the Peacebuilding Fund since its creation.

The Security Council must evolve to better reflect today's global realities. Sweden supports a balanced expansion of the Security Council, by adding permanent and non-permanent seats, including African countries.

We need to act together based on our shared principles and common goals. These include our commitments under the Pact for the Future adopted last year.

Looking ahead, we will seek a candidate for the next UN Secretary-General who leads the way and builds on important reform initiatives.

And let me be clear: Sweden's choice is always merit-based. But isn't it strange that for 80 years, no woman has been elected – especially if the selection is based on merit?

Madam/Mister President,

In a world in which armed conflicts are multiplying, we must not allow injustice to go unpunished. Accountability is critical to uphold our international rules-based order.

The integrity, independence and impartiality of our international legal system, including the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, must be protected.

When I think of accountability, I think of little Angelina.

You have probably seen the picture of her, celebrating her birthday next to a giant teddy bear. She never got to celebrate her third birthday. She was born during Russia's war, and she died from a Russian missile.

Little Angelina and her mother were killed in one of Russia's deadliest attacks on Ukraine in Kyiv, in August this year. The only one saved from the rubble was the giant teddy bear.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is a blatant violation of the very foundation of this organisation. A permanent member of the Security Council has brutally invaded another UN Member State. This cannot be tolerated.

Holding Russia accountable is essential for all of us — to deter further aggression and to preserve the global order.

From the very outset, Ukraine has sought a just and lasting peace, based on international law including the UN Charter. Sweden remains unwavering in its support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Madam/Mister President,

On October 7, 2023, Hamas carried out the worst mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust. Men, women and children were brutally murdered and kidnapped by Hamas terrorists.

When the music faded at the Nova Festival, so did the lives of young, peace-loving people. They were raped, killed and taken hostage. It was truly a painful reminder of how dark the world can be.

The hostages are being held in appalling conditions by Hamas. More pressure must be put on Hamas to immediately release them, and Hamas must never have a place in the future governance of Palestine.

The war in Gaza has led to suffering beyond imagination. We are reminded daily of the painful desperation inside Gaza. The offensive against Gaza City is worsening an already catastrophic situation. Parts of Gaza are now officially in the grips of famine. This cannot go on.

Israel has a right to defend itself. But that right must be exercised in accordance with international law, and the way the Israeli Government is waging the war is unacceptable. The UN and other humanitarian actors must be allowed to work safely in all parts of Gaza.

Humanitarian space must be protected, and aid should never be politicised. Increased pressure on the Israeli Government to change its course and meet its obligations according to international law is urgently needed.

Sweden welcomes international efforts for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is in the interest of all states to not only bring this war to an end, but to ensure a sustainable two-state solution. For a better future for all, both Israelis and Palestinians.

Madam/Mister President,

The situation in Sudan is deeply alarming – it is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, and not given enough attention. Full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, an immediate ceasefire and negotiations ensuring a return to civilian rule are urgently required.

Conflicts all over the world are wasting human potential. Every conflict tears families apart, disrupts education and silences voices.

The cost is immeasurable.

Madam/Mister President,

Authoritarian regimes challenge democracy, rule of law and gender equality. Sadly, resistance against women's and girls' rights is on the rise.

Sweden is honoured to serve as President of the UN Women Executive Board this year.

Gender equality is too often framed as a women's issue, which is a profound misunderstanding. Equality is not only a value we should aspire to, it is a driver of progress.

Strengthening women and girls is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.

Because we know that where women prosper, societies prosper. Equal access to education, work and resources transforms communities.

Economically empowered women invest more in their families, leading to better health, education and overall quality of life for future generations.

Societies that include women in peacebuilding are more likely to enjoy sustainable peace.

We must stand firm against those who seek to roll back freedoms. We must push back the pushback.

Everyone has the right to live safely and freely, regardless of gender, religion or beliefs, skin colour, or whom they love. Sweden will always defend the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

Madam/Mister President,

The crises of our time – armed conflicts, climate change, extreme poverty – demand urgent collective action.

But public aid alone is not enough. To achieve our goals, we need to mobilise finance from every source, not least private capital. We must use synergies between development cooperation and trade to meet growing needs and lay the foundation for economic growth and entrepreneurship.

The green and digital transition brings great opportunities in terms of jobs, growth and solutions to mitigate climate change and achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Emerging technologies, such as AI, hold immense promise in addressing some of our most pressing common challenges. The global community must support innovation, while addressing risks.

Madam/Mister President,

“The UN was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.” These words of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, remain just as valid today.

These are difficult times. But times have been difficult before. Let us not surrender to despair. Most nations continue to stand by the fundamental principles agreed upon 80 years ago.

We should not let this anniversary become a celebration of the past alone. Let’s see this as a call to action. Let’s embrace the spirit of Pippi Longstocking and carry on with fearlessness and conviction.

Together we must act, for ourselves and for future generations. Let them inherit a better, freer and fairer world than the one we found.

For my son Christian and my daughter Kajsa. For all our sons and daughters who deserve to grow up in a world where their paths are not limited by their gender, tradition or violence.

We must not let potential go to waste. We must not let them down.

Thank you.