

Speech by the President During the General Debate of the UN General Assembly in New York

24 September 2025 17:50

Dear leaders!

Dear friends and all those who can become our friends – because you want safety and peace just as much as we do.

Today, no one but ourselves can guarantee security. Only strong alliances. Only strong partners. And only our own weapons. The 21st century isn't much different from the past. If a nation wants peace, it still has to work on weapons. It's sick – but that's the reality. Not international law, not cooperation – weapons decide who survives.

Excellencies!

You know perfectly well – international law doesn't work fully unless you have powerful friends who are truly willing to stand up for it. And even that doesn't work without weapons. It's terrible, but without it, things would be even worse. There are no security guarantees except friends and weapons.

No Ukrainian chose this kind of reality. And knowing our people, they would have chosen a different priority. Ukrainians are peaceful people. But they are people who want to live – to live freely, in their own independent country. That's why we invest in defense. For many nations, there is simply no other way left.

Nations can speak about their pain from stages like this, but even during bloodshed, there isn't a single international institution that can truly stop it. That's how weak these institutions have become.

What can Sudan, or Somalia, or Palestine, or any other people living through war, really expect from the UN or the global system? For decades, just statements and statements.

And even everything happening in Gaza remains without a way out.

Even now, Syria – after all the changes – still has to appeal to the world to ease the sanctions that are choking its economy. It has to ask and wait. Syria deserves stronger support from the international community.

And as Russia's war against my country goes on, people are still dying every week. Yet there is no ceasefire – because Russia refuses.

Russia abducted thousands of Ukrainian children. And we've brought some of them back. And I thank everyone who's helped. But how long will it take to bring all of them home? Childhood slips away faster than adults are able to help.

Look at Israel. Nearly two years have passed, and hostages still haven't been freed. They must be freed. But even that still hasn't happened.

And for years, there have been no real answers to other threats either – chemical weapons, and famine used as a weapon.

Last year at this assembly, I warned the world about the risk of radiation disasters – especially due to Russia's occupation of our Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, the biggest in Europe. But nothing's changed. Nothing. And yesterday, the plant went into blackout again. And Russia hasn't stopped shelling – even in areas near a nuclear facility. And because international institutions are too weak, this madness continues.

Even being part of a long-standing military alliance doesn't automatically mean you're safe. Just recently, 19 simple Russian drones violated Polish airspace. And only 4 were shot down. Luckily, they weren't "shaheds" or even worse. Otherwise, the results would've been horrific.

Estonia had to call a UN Security Council meeting – for the first time in history – because Russian fighter jets deliberately entered its airspace.

Moldova is defending itself – again – from Russia's interference. We're helping Moldova. And Russia's trying to do to Moldova what Iran once did to Lebanon. And the global response? Again – not enough. We have already lost Georgia in Europe. Human rights and the European nature of the state system are only shrinking there. Georgia is dependent on Russia.

And for many, many years, Belarus has also been moving toward dependence on Russia. Europe cannot afford to lose Moldova too.

It's important to remember how the world once ignored the need to help Georgia after Russia's attack – and how the moment was missed with Belarus. Now Moldova must not be lost. And for Europe, supporting Moldova's stability is not costly – but failing to do so would come at a much higher price. That's why the EU needs to help Moldova now – with funding and energy support, not just words or political gestures.

We must not forget about protecting the rights of people – and the rights of nations – in regions where these rights are under threat. The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must apply everywhere. But the Taliban in Afghanistan dragged a whole country back into the dark ages. Cartels in some Latin America countries are more powerful than the governments there. This is all about collapse of international law and the weakness of the international institutions. And so it's about the rise of weapons. Weapons decide who survives.

Excellencies!

Yesterday, President Trump stood right here, in this hall. God saved him from a murder attempt during the campaign. A shot was fired from a rifle, and just a fraction of an inch saved his life.

Just days ago, President – along with hundreds of thousands of Americans – honored the memory of Charlie Kirk. Sadly, his life was cut short by a bullet – once again, violence with a rifle in hand.

We also mourn the Ukrainian woman Iryna Zarutska. She was brutally killed with a knife here in America – the very country where she was seeking refuge from Russia's war.

And almost every day, when we open the news, we see headlines about violent attacks – happening all around the world. Most of it is done with weapons people are already used to. But weapons are evolving faster than our ability to defend ourselves.

Now, there are tens of thousands of people who know how to professionally kill using drones. Stopping that kind of attack is harder than stopping any gun, knife, or bomb. This is what Russia has brought with its war.

It used to be that only the strongest countries could use drones – because they were expensive and complex. Now, even simple drones can fly thousands of kilometers. War tech doesn't care about geography anymore – it's now reshaping it.

Just recently, airports in Europe had to shut down because of drones. Authorities couldn't even say what kind of drones they were, who sent them, or from where.

Last week, North Korea announced the test of a tactical strike drone. That means – even countries with limited resources can now build weapons that are dangerous to their neighbors.

Ukraine – and nations like Saudi Arabia – know all too well how dangerous Iranian attack drones are. But what happens when all the types of drones become available even to small terrorist groups or cartels? The world moves too slowly to protect itself. And weapons move fast.

Now, companies are already working on drones that can shoot down other drones. And it's only a matter of time – not much – before drones are fighting drones, attacking critical infrastructure, and targeting people – all by themselves, fully autonomous, and no human involved – except the few who control AI systems.

Dear leaders!

We are now living through the most destructive arms race in human history – because this time, it includes artificial intelligence. And if there are no real security guarantees – except friends and weapons, and if the world can't respond even to old threats, and if there's no strong platform for international security – will there be any place left on Earth that's still safe for people?

We need global rules – now – for how AI can be used in weapons. And this is just as urgent as preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

We need to restore international cooperation – real, working cooperation – for peace and for security. A few years from now might already be too late.

10 years ago, war looked different. No one imagined that cheap drones could create “dead zones”, areas stretching for dozens of kilometers where nothing moves, no vehicles, no life. People used to imagine that only after a nuclear strike – now it's drone reality. Mass-produced, simple drones, and without AI – yet.

Ukraine doesn't have the “big, fat” missiles dictators love to show off in parades. But we do have drones that can fly up to 2,000–3,000 kilometers. We had no choice but to build them – to protect our right to life.

Control over the sea used to depend on having a big navy. Ukraine doesn't have a big fleet. But we succeeded in the Black Sea – we pushed what's left of the Russian navy into remote bays. And we did it with sea drones. That's how we protect our ports and maritime trade routes – because Russia has left us no other choice.

And our “Spiderweb” operation, when cheap drones destroyed or damaged dozens of expensive Russian strategic bombers, became a real example for special forces around the world of what new weapons can do to old systems. These very Russian bombers attacked our cities.

And none of this would have happened if Putin had not started this full-scale aggression, full-scale war.

And every year that this war goes on, weapons become even more deadly. And only Russia deserves to be blamed for this.

Dear leaders!

To protect lives, Ukraine builds underground schools and underground hospitals. To protect lives, we have to spend more on protecting power stations from drone and missile attacks than on building sports facilities or cultural infrastructure. Ukrainian farmers are learning how to protect their equipment from Russia's FPV drone strikes, and for them, that challenge is far greater than climate change. Russia's war has put us in this situation. But do you have protection against similar threats?

The facts are simple: stopping this war now – and with it, the global arms race – is cheaper than building underground kindergartens or massive bunkers for critical infrastructure later.

Stopping Putin now is cheaper than trying to protect every port and every ship from terrorists with sea drones.

Stopping Russia now is cheaper than wondering who will be the first to create a simple drone carrying a nuclear warhead.

So we must use everything we have – together – to force the aggressor to stop. And only then do we have a real chance that this arms race won't end in catastrophe for all of us. If it takes weapons to do it, if it takes pressure on Russia – then it must be done. And it must be done now. Otherwise, Putin will keep driving the war forward – wider and deeper.

And we told you before – Ukraine is only the first. And now, Russian drones are already flying across Europe. And Russian operations are already spreading across countries. Putin wants to continue this war by expanding it. And no one can feel safe right now.

So first, we are now building a new security architecture for ourselves. More than 30 countries are already part of our Coalition.

And we're strengthening army, launching joint weapons production with partners, and defining financial commitments for defense – in a way that could become a security model for any other nation. If security guarantees work for Ukraine – something more than just friends and weapons – it will mean that people were able to make national security not a privilege for a few nations, but a right for everyone.

Second, we're ready to make our modern weapons become your modern security, your modern weapons. And we've decided to open up arms exports. And these are powerful systems – tested in a real war when every international institution failed.

And we are also ready to grow our defense production together with strong partners so that their protection is modern and reliable. You don't need to start this race from scratch – we are ready to share what has already proven itself in real defense.

And third, many in the world – still relaxed, still. But look at how many countries are here, at this General Assembly – countries that are at war, or just came out of war, or are trying to stop one. Or openly getting ready for one. War has already reached too many people to pretend it has nothing to do with you.

So it depends on you – whether you help peace or continue trading with Russia and helping Russia to fund this war. It depends on you – whether prisoners of war will be freed, whether abducted children will come home, whether hostages will be free. It depends on you – what will define existence: war – like now, or our joint strong actions – as it should be.

Yesterday, we had a good meeting with President Trump. And I also spoke with many other strong leaders. And together, we can change a lot. Of course, we're doing everything to make sure Europe truly helps. And of course, we count on the United States. I appreciate the support we are receiving. Yes, much depends on the G7 and G20. But in the end, peace depends on all of us – on the United Nations.

So don't stay silent while Russia keeps dragging this war on – please, speak out and condemn it.

Please join us in defending life, and international law and order. People are waiting for action. Thank you so much!

Glory to Ukraine!

