

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 23 September 2025

Let me begin with two words we have not been able to say often enough in this Hall:

Madame President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Eighty years ago, in a world scorched by war, leaders made a choice.

Cooperation over chaos.

Law over lawlessness.

Peace over conflict.

That choice gave birth to the United Nations – not as a dream for perfection, but as a practical strategy for the survival of humanity.

Many of our founders had seen first-hand the hell of the death camps and the terror of war.

They knew that true leadership meant creating a system to prevent a replay of those horrors.

A firewall against the flames of conflict and World War III.

A forum for sovereign states to pursue dialogue and cooperation.

And a concrete affirmation of an essential human truth:
We are all in this together.

This General Assembly Hall is the heartbeat of that truth.

It is why for decades world leaders have come to this one-of-a-kind podium.

It is why you are here today.

Because, at its best, the United Nations is more than a meeting place.

It is a moral compass.

A force for peace and peacekeeping.

A guardian of international law.

A catalyst for sustainable development.

A lifeline for people in crisis.

A lighthouse for human rights.

A centre that transforms your decisions – the decisions of Member States – into action.

Eighty years on – we confront again the question our founders faced – only more urgent, more intertwined, more unforgiving:

What kind of world do we choose to build together?

Excellencies,

We have our work cut out for us ... as our ability to carry out that work is being cut *from* us.

We have entered an age of reckless disruption and relentless human suffering.

Look around.

The principles of the United Nations that you have established are under siege.
Listen.

The pillars of peace and progress are buckling under the weight of impunity,
inequality, and indifference.

Sovereign nations, invaded.

Hunger, weaponized.

Truth, silenced.

Rising smoke from bombed-out cities.

Rising anger in fractured societies.

Rising seas swallowing coastlines.

Each one a warning.

Each one a question.

What kind of world will we choose?

A world of raw power -- or a world of laws?

A world that is a scramble for self-interest – or a world where nations come
together?

A world where might makes right – or a world of rights for all?

Excellencies,

Our world is becoming increasingly multipolar.

This can be positive – reflecting a more diverse, dynamic global landscape.

But multipolarity without effective multilateral institutions courts chaos – as
Europe learned the hard way resulting in World War I.

Let's be clear:
International cooperation is not naïveté.

It is hard-headed pragmatism.

In a world where threats leap borders, isolation is an illusion.

No country can stop a pandemic alone.

No army can halt rising temperatures.

No algorithm can rebuild trust once it is broken.

These are global stress tests – of our systems, our solidarity and our resolve.

I am convinced:

We can pass these tests.

And we must.

Because people everywhere are demanding something better.

We owe them a system worthy of their trust – and a future worthy of their dreams.

And so, we must make the choice – an active choice.

To reaffirm the imperative of international law.

To reassert the centrality of multilateralism.

To reinforce justice and human rights.

And to recommit to the principles that gave rise to our organization – and to the promise contained in its first words:

“We the peoples”.

Excellencies,

The choices we face are not part of an ideological debate.
They are a matter of life and death for millions.

As I scan the global landscape, we must make five critical choices.

First, we must choose peace rooted in international law.

Peace is our first obligation.

Yet today, wars rage with a barbarity we vowed never to allow.

Too often, the Charter is brandished when convenient, and trampled when not.

But the Charter is not optional. It is our foundation.

And when the foundation cracks, everything built upon it fractures.

Around the world, we see countries acting as if the rules don't apply to them.

We see humans treated as less than human.

And we must call it out.

Impunity is the mother of chaos – and it has spawned some of the most atrocious conflicts of our times.

In Sudan, civilians are being slaughtered, starved, and silenced. Women and girls face unspeakable violence.

There is no military solution.

We know what must be done. I urge all parties, including those in this Hall: End the external support that is fueling this bloodshed. Push to protect civilians.

The Sudanese people deserve peace, dignity, and hope.

In Ukraine, relentless violence continues to kill civilians, destroy civilian infrastructure, and threaten global peace and security.

I commend recent diplomatic efforts by the United States and others. We must work for a full ceasefire and a just, lasting peace in accordance with the Charter, UN resolutions and international law.

In Gaza, the horrors are approaching a third monstrous year. They are the result of decisions that defy basic humanity.

The scale of death and destruction are beyond any other conflict in my years as Secretary-General.

The International Court of Justice has issued legally binding provisional measures in the case named: “Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip”.

Since then, a famine has been declared, and the killing has intensified.

The measures stipulated by the ICJ must be implemented -- fully and immediately.

Nothing can justify the horrific Hamas terror attacks of October 7 and the taking of hostages, both of which I have repeatedly condemned.

And nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and the systematic destruction of Gaza.

We know what is needed:

Permanent ceasefire now. All the hostages released now. Full humanitarian access now.

And we must not relent in the only viable answer to sustainable Middle East peace: a two-State solution.

We must urgently reverse dangerous trends on the ground.

Relentless settler expansion and violence, and the looming threat of annexation must stop.

Everywhere – from Haiti to Yemen to Myanmar to the Sahel and beyond -- we must choose peace anchored in international law.

The past year has brought glimmers of hope, including: the ceasefire between Cambodia and Thailand, and the agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, brokered by the United States.

But far too many crises continue unchecked.

Impunity prevails.

Lawlessness is a contagion.

It invites mayhem, accelerates terror, and risks a nuclear free-for-all.

When accountability shrinks, graveyards grow.

When UN staff and facilities are attacked – violating legal obligations -- so, too, is the core of our ability to serve and deliver.

The Security Council must live up to its responsibilities.

It must be more representative, more transparent, and more effective.

And beyond crisis response, we must tackle the injustices that ignite conflict – exclusion, inequality, corruption, impunity.

The surest way to silence the guns is to raise the volume for justice.

Real security is born of fairness and opportunity for all.

Which leads me to the second point: we must choose human dignity and human rights.

Human rights are not an ornament of peace – they are its bedrock.

Human rights – economic, social, cultural, political, civil -- are universal, indivisible and interdependent.

Choosing rights means more than words.

It means justice over silence.

It means protecting freedom and civic space;

Advancing equality for women and girls;

Confronting racism and bigotry in all its forms;

Safeguarding human rights defenders, journalists, and freedom of speech;

And upholding the rights of refugees and migrants, so mobility is safe and grounded in international law.

Human rights are an everyday battle – on- and offline.

They require political will.

But dignity is not only about rights protected.

It is about rights fulfilled – through inclusive, resilient development.

Rights that close the door on poverty and hunger.

Rights that open doors to education, health, and opportunity.

The Sustainable Development Goals are our shared roadmap to realize these rights.

But moving down any road requires fuel.

Finance is that fuel.

We've seen what development done right can deliver:

In the past decade, millions more have gained access to electricity, clean cooking and the internet.

Child marriage is declining.

Women's representation is growing.

But aid cuts are wreaking havoc.

They are a death sentence for many.

A stolen future for many more.

This is the paradox of our time:

We know what we need... yet we are pulling away the very lifeline that makes it possible.

To choose dignity, we must choose financial justice and solidarity.

We need to reform the international financial architecture so it drives development for all.

With bigger and bolder Multilateral Development Banks – lending and leveraging more private investment and finance.

With faster and fairer debt relief – reaching every country in crisis, including middle-income economies.

With resources kept where they belong – by tackling illicit flows and abusive tax practices that rob societies of their future.

And global financial institutions that represent today's world – with far greater participation of developing countries.

Let us choose a global economy that works for everyone.

Let us choose human rights and dignity.

And let us power a just transition for people and planet.

Which takes us to the third choice: We must choose climate justice.

The climate crisis is accelerating.

So are the solutions.

The clean energy future is no longer a distant promise. It's here.

No government, industry, or special interest can stop it.

But some are trying – hurting economies, locking in higher prices, and squandering a historic opportunity.

Excellencies,

Fossil fuels are a losing bet.

Last year, almost all new power capacity came from renewables – and investment is surging.

Renewables are the cheapest and fastest source of new power.

They create jobs, drive growth, shield economies from volatile oil and gas markets, connect the unconnected, and can free us from the tyranny of fossil fuels.

But not at today's pace.

Clean energy investment remains uneven.

Twenty-first century grids and storage are not rolling out fast enough.

And public subsidies – taken from taxpayer money -- still flow to fossil fuels over clean energy by a factor of nine to one.

Meanwhile, emissions, temperatures, and disasters keep rising.

And those least responsible suffer the most.

Science says limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees by the end of this century is still possible.

But the window is closing.

The International Court of Justice has affirmed the legal obligation of States.

We need stepped-up action *and* ambition – especially through strengthened national climate plans.

Tomorrow, I will welcome leaders to announce new targets.

The G20 – the biggest emitters -- must lead, guided by common but differentiated responsibilities.

But all countries must step up as we head to the UN Climate Conference in Brazil.

By accelerating action in energy, forests, methane and industrial decarbonization.

By defining a credible roadmap to mobilize 1.3 trillion US dollars annually in climate finance by 2035 for developing countries.

By supporting just transitions.

By doubling finance for adaptation to at least 40 billion US dollars this year and rapidly deploying proven tools to unlock billions more in concessional finance.

And by capitalizing the Loss and Damage Fund with significant contributions.

All of this requires governments, international financial institutions, philanthropies, civil society, and the private sector to work together:

To provide fiscal space to developing countries and unlock new and innovative sources of finance at scale -- including solidarity levies on high-emitting sectors and debt swaps.

We have the solutions and tools.

But we must choose climate justice and climate action.

Fourth, we must choose to put technology at the service of humanity.

Artificial Intelligence is rewriting human existence in real time.

Transforming how we learn, work, communicate – and what we can trust.

The question is not how to stop it, but how to steer it for the greater good.

Technology must be our servant – not our master.

It must promote human rights, human dignity, and human agency.

Yet today, AI's advancement is outpacing regulation and responsibility – concentrated in a few hands.

And the risks are expanding to new frontiers – from biotech to autonomous weapons.

We are witnessing the rise of tools for mass surveillance, mass social control, mass disruption, and even mass destruction.

Tools that can drain energy, strain ecosystems, and intensify the race for critical minerals – potentially stoking instability and conflict.

Yet, these technologies remain largely ungoverned.

We need universal guardrails and common standards – across platforms.

No company should be above the law.

No machine should decide who lives or dies.

No system should be deployed without transparency, safety, and accountability.

Last month, this Assembly took a historic step – establishing an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI, and an annual Global Dialogue on AI Governance.

Two new pillars of a shared architecture:

Connecting science with policy to bring clarity and foresight;

Enabling innovation to flourish while advancing our values and rights;

And ensuring governments, companies and civil society can help shape common norms.

We must build on these mechanisms – and close the capacity gap.

All countries must be able to design and develop AI – not just consume it.

I have proposed voluntary financing options to build AI computing power, data, and skills in developing nations.

No country should be locked out of the digital future – or locked into systems it cannot shape or trust.

Governments must lead with vision.

Companies must act with responsibility.

And we – the international community – must ensure that technology lifts up humanity.

So let us choose:

Cooperation over fragmentation;

Ethics over expediency;

And transparency over opacity;

Technology will not wait for us.

But we can still choose what it serves.

Let us choose wisely.

Fifth and finally, to meet all these goals, we must choose to strengthen the United Nations for the 21st century.

The forces shaking our world are also testing the foundations of the United Nations system.

We are being hit by rising geopolitical tensions and divisions, chronic uncertainty, and mounting financial strain.

But those who depend on the United Nations must not be made to bear the cost.

Especially now – when for every dollar invested to support our core work to build peace, the world spends 750 dollars on weapons of war.

This is not only unsustainable – it is indefensible.

In this moment of crisis, the United Nations has never been more essential.

The world needs our unique legitimacy. Our convening power. Our vision to unite nations, bridge divides, and confront the challenges before us.

The Pact for the Future has shown your determination to build a United Nations that is stronger, more inclusive, and more effective.

That is the logic – and the urgency – of our UN80 Initiative.

We are moving swiftly and decisively.

I have put forward concrete proposals:

A revised budget for 2026 that strengthens accountability, improves delivery, and cuts costs.

Practical reforms to implement mandates more effectively and efficiently, with greater impact.

And ideas to spark a paradigm shift in the structure of the UN and how its parts work together.

Most of these decisions rest with you, the Member States.

We will move forward in full respect of established procedures.

Together, let us choose to invest in a United Nations that adapts, innovates and is empowered to deliver for people everywhere.

Excellencies,

My overriding message comes down to this: Now is the time to choose.

It is not enough to know what the right choices are.

I urge you to make them.

I grew up in a world where choices were few.

I was raised in the darkness of dictatorship, where fear silenced voices and hope was nearly crushed.

Yet, even in the bleakest hours -- especially then -- I discovered a truth that has never left me:

Power does not reside in the hands of those who dominate or divide.

Real power rises from people -- from our shared resolve to uphold dignity.

To defend equality.

To believe, fiercely, in our common humanity, and the potential of every human being.

I learned early to persevere. To speak out. To refuse to surrender.

No matter the challenge. No matter the obstacle. No matter the hour.

We must -- and we will -- overcome.

Because in a world of many choices, there is one choice we must never make:

The choice to give up.

We must never give up.

That is my promise to you.

For peace. For dignity. For justice. For humanity.

For the world we know is possible when we work as one.

I will never, ever give up.

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