



General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

7th plenary meeting
Thursday, 26 September 2019, 9 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Muhammad-Bande (Nigeria)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Amde (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m.

Address by His Majesty King Tupou VI, King of the Kingdom of Tonga

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the King of the Kingdom of Tonga.

King Tupou VI, King of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Majesty King Tupou VI, King of the Kingdom of Tonga, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

King Tupou: I congratulate His Excellency Mr. Muhammad-Bande on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I assure him that the delegation of the Kingdom of Tonga will fully support his able leadership. I also express our gratitude to his predecessor, Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for her successful presidency of the Assembly at its seventy-third session, under the theme “Making the United Nations relevant to all people through global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies”. I also commend His Excellency Mr. António Guterres for his inaugural visit to the Pacific Islands region in May and his continued stewardship of the Secretariat. Tonga fully supports the ongoing work

he is undertaking on reform of the United Nations to ensure its relevance and utility for all Member States.

My delegation and I congratulate the President on his four priorities to guide our work during this session, namely, promoting international peace and security, in particular conflict prevention; strengthening global action to tackle climate change, which is integral to the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); accentuating inclusion, human rights and the empowerment of youth and women; and promoting partnerships for advancing the achievement of the SDGs, which are interlinked, very timely and relevant to addressing, during his tenure, the challenges of our time, which we fully support.

We welcome the President’s recognition of the challenges faced by small island delegations, such as ours, to ensure we are able to contribute equitably and effectively to the many important high-level meetings to be convened during this session. With five summits this week alone in addition to our general debate, we are grateful for his particular attention to enabling smaller delegations to participate fully.

Tonga continues its commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, including the small island developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. We are pleased to participate at the high-level midterm review of the SAMOA Pathway tomorrow to ensure its goals are being met at the halfway point of its implementation. The Government’s sustainable development priorities

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remain aligned with 13 of the 17 SDGs, namely, Goals 1 to 4, 6 to 9 and 13 to 17.

Tonga's first voluntary national review report, presented at the United Nations High-level Political Forum on sustainable development, held in July, spoke to the localization of the SDGs and the SAMOA Pathway through Tonga's strategic development framework. A whole-of-government approach for coordinated and coherent service delivery continues to be a priority. We once again recognize the important contribution to our efforts by the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. We are also grateful for the enhanced engagement in Tonga by the United Nations Office for Project Services through our recently concluded host country agreement.

Tonga welcomed the convening of the Climate Action Summit earlier this week. My country engaged fully in that seminal gathering of leaders to again give prominence to the threats posed by climate change, with its direct links to international peace and security, and thereby to our sustainable development aspirations, in support of SDG 13 and its targets. The 1.5°C limit is the heart of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and, although my country, along with our Pacific small island developing States neighbours as a whole, contributes not even close to 1 per cent of global warming, we remain committed to the Agreement. Securing climate financing is the main priority for Tonga, as without it no action on our nationally determined contributions is possible. We welcome the announcement by the United Kingdom of its intention to double its contribution to the Green Climate Fund.

Pacific leaders in Tuvalu last month endorsed the strongest statement to date on climate change. The Kainaki II Declaration declared a climate-change crisis in the Pacific Islands region and called for urgent action to reduce global greenhouse-gas emissions and prevent catastrophic global warming and disasters. Extreme events like cyclones and typhoons, flooding, drought and king tides are increasingly more intense, inflicting damage and destruction on our communities and ecosystems and putting the health of our peoples at risk. At this time, we are thinking of our fellow islanders in the Bahamas, as they work to recover after

the devastating impacts and destruction in the wake of Hurricane Dorian.

Climate change is not only a political issue for us, but also one of survival. The fact that climate change is an existential threat and a matter of international peace and security was again endorsed by Pacific leaders through their decision to develop the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. We continue to support the work of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security. We continue to recognize the important nexus between the climate and the ocean, and furthermore continue to note with concern the devastating impacts of climate change on our marine environment. We look forward to deliberations on this link in Chile, at the twenty-fifth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, later this year.

Important issues of baselines that determine our maritime boundaries, once established under the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, should not be affected and should remain unchanged, despite the effects of sea-level rise. Our sovereignty must not be compromised by the effects of climate change, and we continue to welcome and support the work of the International Law Commission on this critically important and timely issue for consideration of the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly.

Tonga has continued its engagement in this year's second and third sessions of Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). We look forward to the next revision of the draft instrument, with the hope that the ongoing convergence of understandings by Member States engaging in the process will find completion at the fourth, and final, session of the Conference early next year. We also welcome the establishment of the Friends of BBNJ Capacity Development, which is the cross-cutting issue tying together all elements of the Convention.

Tonga also continues its engagement at the International Seabed Authority. Together with other members of the Authority, Tonga remains committed, including in its capacity as an elected member of its Council, to continuing to work towards the finalization of the important draft exploitation regulations to ensure

an appropriate balance between the need to conserve and protect the marine environment and the sustainable use of deep-sea mineral resources. Importantly, we must ensure our work is appropriately informed and properly concluded in support of Sustainable Development Goal 14. The presidency of the Council of the Authority will rotate to the Asia-Pacific Group in 2020 for the twenty-sixth session, and Tonga has presented its candidature for election to that important position.

As Tonga was also privileged to host the first International Seabed Authority regional workshop for the Pacific in February, it also remained engaged with the Authority's Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth and attended related workshops for sponsoring States in Nauru and Kiribati last month. We look forward to continuing our collective work in the Cook Islands and in Tonga in the coming months, before the second Ocean Conference in mid-2020.

Tonga commends the work of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. We are grateful for the Commission's recommendations on our first partial submission last month. We look forward to its eventual consideration of our second partial submission in good time. We would like to acknowledge Italy's ongoing partnership with Tonga through the joint committee in strengthening our capacity in the field of the environment and the ocean. We also acknowledge the work of the secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pew Charitable Trust on the regional deep-sea minerals treaty.

Tonga's priority nationally determined contribution is to achieve 50 per cent renewable energy by 2020. We have been able to negotiate the funding required to achieve this goal and would like to thank our partners that assist Tonga through public and public-private financing to accelerate my country's transition to renewable energy and resilient infrastructure in support of Sustainable Development Goal 7 and its associated targets. Tonga is also pleased to continue in its capacity as an elected Vice-President of the Assembly of the Small Island Developing States Sustainable Energy and Climate Resilience Initiative, on behalf of Pacific SIDS members.

Finally, sustainable development, whether it be through good health and well-being, climate action, life below water or affordable and clean energy, inter alia, can be realized only through the achievement and maintenance of international peace and security.

We continue to look to the Security Council to protect the innocent from threats to international peace and security in all their forms, be they traditional threats such as armed conflict or newer threats such as climate change, rising sea levels and health epidemics, to ensure that no one is left behind.

May Almighty God guide and bless the President of the General Assembly, all the States Members of the United Nations and their respective Governments and peoples.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank His Majesty the King of the Kingdom of Tonga for the statement he has just made.

His Majesty King Tupou VI, King of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Cyprus.

Mr. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Anastasiades: At the outset, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the President and assure him of my Government's unwavering support during his tenure.

I consider the chosen theme for this year's General Assembly to be particularly pertinent, given that the combination of poverty, lack of adequate educational opportunities, social and economic exclusion and climate change constitute the most serious problems facing billions of human beings around the world — human beings who are placing their hopes in the international community to undertake efficient and effective measures, human beings who do not wish to be recipients of mere verbal support or wishful thinking that will expire at the end of the session. We should not only address the root causes of these challenges, but also reflect on why we have yet to tackle them.

Indeed, one cannot deny that failing to effectively tackle these challenges has, in turn, further aggravated such growing phenomena as religious fundamentalism, violent extremism, sectarianism, destruction of cultural heritage, civil war and ethnic conflict. What is most alarming, however, is that the combination of those factors has led to the forcible displacement of millions of people and unprecedented waves of refugee and migratory flows.

Leaving aside the strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures of the United Nations, we should not overlook that it is the only international forum where nations can collectively interact, deliberate and pursue common goals, work together to resolve not only their differences but also pressing regional and international challenges that are not country-specific, and call the international order into question. That is why it is our strong conviction that, in order to finally eliminate the threats we are facing in an increasingly interdependent world, there is only one answer: multilateralism, decisive collective action, international cooperation, greater solidarity and stronger partnerships.

For some, alternatives to multilateralism may seem attractive. Certain States might want to serve their short-sighted interests at the expense of universal principles. However, history has repeatedly taught us the catastrophic consequences of not adhering to the principles, rules and synergies we have commonly developed within the framework of the United Nations. It is for this very reason that we lend our unwavering support to the reform priorities of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, which aim to reinforce the effectiveness of the Organization and further advance multilateralism, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance and long-term development and growth. Setting aside diverging aspirations and conflicting interests, we should rise to meet our shared responsibility and collectively strengthen our support and commitment to the United Nations.

I have talked about the challenges we are facing and the humanitarian crises of refugees and migration flows. At the same time, we must also realize that we are at a defining moment with regard to climate change. I was particularly touched by the massive presence of young people at the Climate Action Summit and by their sincere calls of worry and concern about the effects of climate change. I was deeply affected in particular by the words of 16-year-old Greta Thunberg,

who stated that the eyes of all future generations are upon us. Indeed, we collectively carry the obligation to provide to the generations to come a better future, a greener planet.

Imagine how climate change will affect our world if we do not decisively act today. Record-high temperatures and protracted heat waves, devastating fires and deforestation, melting ice and sea-level rise, droughts, floods and extreme weather phenomena attest to the dire situation we are facing. Taking into account the particularly alarming projections concerning the impact of climate change on our immediate region, namely, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, Cyprus has recently undertaken an initiative to coordinate regional climate-change actions. More specifically, this initiative intends to bring together our regions' leading scientists and policymakers, with a view to developing practical and achievable solutions that will have durable benefits for our citizens.

Cyprus is also at the forefront of other initiatives aimed at establishing conditions of peace and stability in our region, through, inter alia, establishing synergies and enhancing our relations with neighbouring countries. Such advanced cooperation is based on the doctrine of multilateralism and positive agendas without any exclusions. It constitutes a promising step towards institutionalizing partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Over the past 45 years, we have undertaken the same positive initiatives in order to end the unacceptable status quo in my homeland and achieve lasting peace and stability there. The status quo is the result of the illegal Turkish invasion in 1974, the violation of the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus, the consequent military occupation of more than a third of the country and the forcible displacement of 40 per cent of its population. Since 1974, despite the sincere efforts and the constructive engagement of both my predecessors and me in seeking a just and fair settlement, Cyprus has unfortunately remained the last divided country in Europe.

We are currently in the midst of a new effort that is providing a glimmer of hope. I wish to stress in the strongest manner my full dedication and support to the new effort by the Secretary-General to resume the process from the point where it stopped at Crans-Montana. In that context, and following a call from the Secretary-General for an agreed basis for the

resumption of negotiations, there is an understanding by the leaders of the two communities that the relevant terms of reference should be comprised of the following elements: first, the Joint Declaration on Cyprus of 11 February 2014, which sets out the basic guidelines and principles for the framework of the sought-after solution, as well as the methodology of the negotiating process; secondly, the convergences achieved that had led to the holding of the Conference on Cyprus at Crans-Montana; and, thirdly, the six-point framework of the Secretary-General on security and guarantees, troops, effective participation, territorial adjustments, property and equitable treatment, as presented on 30 June 2017 at Crans-Montana.

Such an understanding could pave the way for the resumption of talks with the sole aim of reaching a comprehensive settlement on the basis of what has been agreed as a historic compromise by our side, namely, the evolution of the Republic of Cyprus into a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant Security Council resolutions and high-level agreements, with a single sovereignty, a single international legal personality and a single citizenship. It would be a settlement that will establish a viable, functional and lasting State, free from foreign dependencies, foreign troops and the rights of intervention by third countries. The settlement should not deviate from the relevant Security Council resolutions and European Union values and principles.

I want to send a clear message: the United Nations and the Secretary-General's good-offices mission is the only way forward for us.

Regrettably, while the efforts at resuming the negotiating process are under way, recent actions by Turkey not only violate international law but severely undermine the aim of having an environment conducive to meaningful negotiations. While I do not intend to embark on a blame game, I cannot — nor will the dignity of my people allow me to — accept gun-boat diplomacy, blackmail tactics and attempts to force our side to negotiate under duress. Is it possible for the efforts of the Secretary-General to succeed while Turkey continues to violate the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus in its internationally recognized exclusive economic zone and continental shelf? Is it possible when Turkey threatens Cyprus with severe consequences if we move forward again with our energy programme? Is it possible when Turkey threatens neighbouring States and energy companies with which we cooperate and

have established conventional obligations? Is it possible for the efforts of the Secretary-General to succeed when recent public statements and acts by Turkish officials signal plans to build settlements in the fenced area of Varosha, the uninhabited part of Famagusta that is under illegal Turkish military occupation?

With regard to Varosha, I wish to stress that its distinct status has been recognized in all reports of the Secretary-General and by the United Nations operations in Cyprus. More specifically, the framework for the resettlement of Varosha by its lawful inhabitants, under the auspices of the United Nations, was set as a priority by both the 1979 high-level agreement between the leaders of the two communities and Security Council resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992). In that regard, we deeply appreciate the recent reaffirmation by the Secretary-General that the position of the United Nations on the matter remains unchanged and is still guided by the Security Council resolutions.

As we speak, we are also confronted by an increasingly aggressive positioning of the Turkish military and an escalation of violations in the buffer zone. All those developments make the role of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus and the fulfilment of its mandate more necessary than ever. And as if it were not enough that we have been confronted by the challenges I mentioned, two days ago, in this Hall, the Turkish President, Mr. Erdoğan, embarked on an address in which he made misleading allegations. He referred, *inter alia*, to an uncompromising position of the Greek Cypriot side, saying that

“those who claim to be working towards solving the Cyprus problem with zero security and zero guarantee have had ill-intentions from the outset” (*A/74/PV.3, p. 21*).

I wonder, and would ask, if it is uncompromising and ill-intentioned to aspire to establishing an independent and sovereign State, free from the presence of occupying troops. Is it uncompromising and ill-intentioned to envision terminating the anachronistic Treaty of Guarantee and establish a robust system of security, fully based on the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant European Union treaties? Which of the other 193 States Members of the United Nations is subject to a system of guarantees with a third country? Is it uncompromising and ill-intentioned to aspire to establish a normal State in which all decisions will be made only by Cypriots, free from foreign dependency?

President Erdoğan further alleged that the Greek Cypriot side “refuses to share political power and prosperity with the Turkish Cypriots.” (*ibid.*) Are we refusing to share political power and prosperity with the Turkish Cypriots when we have accepted political equality as defined by the Secretary-General and as upheld by the relevant Security Council resolutions, and when the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, within the context of the negotiating process, have reached an agreement on the issue of natural resources, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea? We have also conveyed our readiness, still within the framework of meaningful negotiations, to deposit revenues accrued from the exploitation of hydrocarbons to an escrow account for the Turkish Cypriot community, through which we are protecting the Turkish Cypriot community’s rightful share, in accordance with the population ratio of the future constituent States.

President Erdoğan also claimed that Turkey has a reasonable approach to the issue of energy resources and that he and his country will ultimately protect the legitimate rights of the Turkish Cypriots until the very end. Is it a reasonable approach to unilaterally and unlawfully conduct hydrocarbon-exploration drilling in another country’s exclusive economic zone through the threat of use of force? And I wonder whose interests Turkey is protecting when its claims to limit the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus by 44 per cent for its own benefit and at the expense of the rights and interests of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

As I stated earlier, it was not, and is not, my intention to embark on a confrontation. To the contrary, I fully ascribe to Mr. Erdoğan’s emotional concluding remarks, as they encapsulate the essence of what we are trying to achieve in Cyprus — “freedom for all, peace for all, prosperity for all, justice for all and a peaceful and safe future for all.” (*ibid. p. 26*) This is my further vision — and it is also the vision of the people of Cyprus: to end the unacceptable status quo with the establishment of a State that will ensure a shared prosperous future for coming generations of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, enabling them to live freely together and collaborate in conditions of stability, safety and peaceful coexistence. Only then will we be able to utilize the unfulfilled potential and capacities of our country. I will not deviate from pursuing this vision, and I call for Members’ solidarity in supporting efforts to reach a solution to the Cyprus problem. It is not only

in the interests of the people of Cyprus, but also for the benefit and in the interests of Turkey, the region and the international community.

I may have devoted a large part of my address to the Cyprus problem. I did not, however, neglect or overlook the vast importance of global challenges, particularly poverty, climate change and sustainable development. The solution to tackling those challenges rests entirely on the decisiveness of the States Members of the United Nations in finally putting aside short-term interests and expediencies and reaching a joint understanding of the need to fully adhere to the Charter, resolutions and decisions of our common family. Only then will we fulfil our collective aims and targets and bestow a better future upon our children, grandchildren and the generations to come.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Cyprus for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Serbia.

Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Vučić: I have the honour to address the General Assembly as the President of the Republic of Serbia — a country of good and honest people who gave me their trust and honoured me to with the task of representing them before the Assembly and in a world where, through their hard work, they have regained the place that belongs to them. When I was last in this Hall, two years ago (see A/72/PV.11), it was said that the situation in the world was harder than that of the prior year, 2016. I would not say that in 2019 it is any easier, for it is the contrary that is true.

Members have noticed that, like children, all of us gather in this big Hall when we need to hear what the great Powers think about us and our future. A bit scared and worried, we are happy when it is over and that we have not been mentioned in their speeches. Unfortunately, it is with mockery that we look at those who were mentioned because we were not in their shoes. And, in this way, we survive another year. I am not speaking about just one great Power but about all the great Powers. I come from a small country, albeit the largest in the Western Balkans, which suffered the most in the First World War. I come from a people who survived the most egregious suffering and the Jasenovac genocide in the Second World War and a people who, above all, want peace, stability and the possibility to move forward in the twenty-first century.

The former Yugoslavia — and its legal successor, Serbia — was one of the founders of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Today, we are on the path towards membership of the European Union (EU), which is a strategic commitment of our country. But in this Hall and in any other place we will advocate more strongly than ever not only for respect for the rights, independence and sovereignty of small countries but also for the ability always to preserve equality and our right to freedom and independent decision-making by acting together.

That is why I am going to speak about Serbia and the region because one does not go without the other. Let me paraphrase Ernest Hemingway. Serbia is not an island, but, I proudly say, a part of the Balkans and it is stronger if those around it are stronger. That is why I strive for the region, almost to the same extent as I strive for Serbia. That is why we are so eager for the Balkans to accept a policy of cooperation and that is why we will always strive to talk to each other. We will always advocate a policy of peace and cooperation because it is the only way to create the necessary stability, without which there is no economic growth and progress.

I come from a country that had to face very difficult reforms in 2014. We were on the brink of bankruptcy and complete ruin. Today, Serbia has no problems with its public finances, and I want to report wonderful news to the citizens of my country. We expect one of the largest global credit agencies, as early as tomorrow, to increase not only the outlook but also the credit rating of our country. According to projections by experts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the gross domestic product of Serbia will cumulatively grow by

12.5 per cent, or 4 per cent a year, over the next three years. That result will not be achieved by any other country in the region.

The IMF envisages that the GDP per capita, which is a reliable indicator of the standard of living, will be \$10.394 in 2023. That is an increase of approximately 45 per cent as compared to \$7.207 last year. It will therefore have almost doubled in only five years.

Precisely because of its stable economic situation, in the first seven months of this year Serbia attracted €2.32 billion in foreign direct investment, which is much more than in the same period last year. It was the most successful year for Serbia.

Finally, Serbia has by far the lowest unemployment rate in the region, at 10.3 per cent. In addition, we invest in the future of Serbia through knowledge, and we are now known for the export of information technology products and software. Last year, that export exceeded €1 billion.

Here is an important question: do we live well? Do people in the region live well? The answer is no. We need decades of peace, hard and diligent work and great successes in order to bring ourselves closer to the developed European countries. Nevertheless, under such conditions and due to the economic progress, Serbia chose an independent foreign policy and independent decision-making as its path towards the future.

That is why we do not hide anywhere, not even in this Hall, but we praise the good and friendly relations that we have with the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation and the better and better relations with the United States of America because our task is to take care of our people. We do not care what someone else in the world may tell us, whether we were buying gas or chocolate, we chose the highest quality and the most affordable goods. We do not care what other big Powers think of that because we believe that we are entitled to think and to decide our own destiny and what is best for our own people, not do what other big and powerful ones think.

Members all know that we face problems regarding the territorial integrity of Serbia, that in fact we face the pending issue of Kosovo and Metohija. The unresolved problem of Kosovo and Metohija affects above all the economic progress and future of the young people in the region and in Serbia. That is why I will speak about efforts to resolve that despite all the obstacles.

The Serbian writer and diplomat Jovan Dučić said that enemies are only our friends in disguise, who distance themselves from us only because of some kind of misunderstanding or prejudice. The centuries-long problem of Kosovo and Metohija is far from a misunderstanding or prejudice, but we have courageously and realistically, with will and faith, started the quest for a lasting solution.

No one cares more about resolving this difficult burden than Serbia because it would provide not only our country but also the entire region with peace, stability, cooperation, economic prosperity and progress on our EU path. That is why we expect the world, especially the big Powers, to see, understand and support our positions and arguments, as well as not to support moves in the opposite direction, as they did in the crucial years from 1999 to 2008.

As the United States President John Kennedy said, we cannot negotiate with people who say what is mine is mine and what is yours is negotiable. That is why, as I see it, a lasting solution should be reached in such a way that neither of the parties would gain everything but they would gain enough.

Even though we do not recognize the unilaterally declared independence of the so-called Kosovo, just as fewer and fewer countries do — because in accordance with the legally binding Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), Kosovo and Metohija is an autonomous province within the Republic of Serbia, under the administration of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) — in the desire for peace and stability, we had a dialogue with the Albanians who live there, facilitated by the European Union. Through our concessions, we made certain progress and witnessed it by signing the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations. However, the obligations assumed under the respective Agreement were met only by Serbia. We continued the dialogue despite frequent tensions and incidents in Kosovo and despite the various unilateral moves of Pristina, which made it difficult, until it stopped due to the most unreasonable unilateral move of all, that is, the imposition of a 100 per cent tariff on the import of Serbian goods, which actually means the full termination of the flow of goods.

Between the time when Kosovo imposed tariffs, on 21 November 2018, and 21 August of this year, we lost approximately €350 million. The tariffs, which are

still in force, also jeopardize the normal and dignified life of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Throughout this time, Serbia reacted moderately and responsibly to Pristina's unilateral acts, not imposing countermeasures and trying to calm the situation.

It is not only the interests of Belgrade and Pristina that are intertwined through the problems of Kosovo and Metohija but also those of various international stakeholders. As long as it continues like that, Kosovo will be a source of endless political manipulation and instability. That is precisely why the presence of the United Nations, through the work of UNMIK, is necessary as a guarantee of safety for the Serbs living there.

Despite everything, I believe that the agreement between Serbs and Albanians is of the utmost importance to the stability of the Balkans and that those two nations have a role in our region that Winston Churchill intended for France and Germany when he spoke of uniting Europe. We are ready to continue to make efforts to reach a solution to the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. If that were not the case, we would not be starting to build the highway section from Nis to Pristina next year.

Serbia has always been a crossroads and, as such, it became the seat of the Southeast Europe Transport Community. We have just finished the highway towards North Macedonia. At the beginning of November, we inaugurated a highway towards Bulgaria. We are building a highway towards Montenegro, and there is an ongoing plan to connect with Romania with a better road. We are building railways towards Hungary and modernizing the railways towards Montenegro and North Macedonia. It is my wish to revive the railway between Belgrade and Sarajevo.

Three days ago, I had an important meeting with the Prime Ministers of North Macedonia and Albania. We agreed to start working for ourselves, for our region, not to unite but to enable the free flow of goods, capital and services and to start creating a common market — to start something a little revolutionary because nations in the Balkans do not have to serve only others, but together they can achieve the best and greatest things for themselves.

Until today, we fought for who would support one, two or three big Powers and which Power would create a better future for us. I am not at all naive, and I know that in the future we will to a great extent depend on the

big Powers. But everything that we can do ourselves we should not, and will not, leave to others. That is why the Balkans should belong to the Balkan nations — a sovereign and free people, who will know how to fight in the best way for their own future. We want the same for all other nations worldwide and we will always fight for that in this noble institution.

In approximately 10 days, Serbia will also start to build a highway between Belgrade and Sarajevo, just as we have already built, or are building, many roads and railways because we want to be closer to all our neighbours so as to get to know and understand each other better. We are also building a highway towards Banja Luka to help reduce political tensions resulting from cross-border provocations and to lead to an increase in cooperation.

One of the ways to achieve that cooperation is through the establishment of a regional economic zone. No one should be afraid that a new Yugoslavia is hiding behind this idea, or that it is an expression of, or a desire for, Serbian hegemony, just because it is coming from Belgrade. I believe that our small divided markets in the Western Balkans would be of far more interest to everyone if we were to act together. A regional cooperation and economic zone would not be a substitute for the European Union, but it could be an expression of our concern for ourselves, at least until we finalize the long process of achieving European integration.

Serbia respects all States Members of the United Nations and their territorial integrity and sovereignty. We have never asked, nor will we ever ask, for something that is not ours. We expect to receive the same level of respect. We do not grant ourselves the right to divide the world into who is good and who is bad, nor to evaluate what is right and what is wrong. We are proud of our freedom-loving tradition and our historical contribution to the fight to uphold law and justice. We advocate that all outstanding issues in the world be resolved in a peaceful manner through dialogue and in line with international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

We want to cherish old friendships and build new ones, which is why we are proud to say, here, in the most important Hall in the world, that we will do our best to improve our cooperation with all African, Asian and Latin American countries. That is also how we see the future of Serbia and the future of the world. However, friendship is not something that can be given once and

last forever — it should be continuously maintained and nurtured. In that regard, the countries of the world can always rely on Serbia.

As I said before, we are on our path towards joining the EU and we have partnerships and relations with Western countries, including increasingly intensive cooperation with the United States of America. We are also proud of our excellent relations with Russia and China, and cooperation with friendly African, Asia-Pacific and Latin American countries is another focus of Serbian foreign policy.

“If there is anything that a man can do well, I say let him do it. Give him the chance.” With those words, often attributed to the great statesman Abraham Lincoln, I would like to thank the Assembly for its attention and conclude by saying a few words in Serbian, which will be very well understood by an entire region: “*Balkan, balkanskim narodima; živela Srbija*”.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Serbia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Radev: At the outset, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for his able guidance, which I believe will lead us to answers for the pressing challenges we face. Today, more than ever, we need to stand for a rules-based multilateral system with the United Nations at its core. In that context, I would like to express our support for the timely and important initiative launched by Germany and France for the creation of an Alliance for Multilateralism, a network

of like-minded nations working to foster effective multilateral approaches to global issues through the United Nations. This initiative perfectly matches this year's topic for the general debate.

Allow me to say a few words on the different building blocks of our main topic as set forth in the overarching theme of this session — sustainable development for all parts of our planet. The High-level Political Forum on sustainable development is a pivotal event at the margins of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. The need to accelerate the pace of progress in achieving all Sustainable Development Goals is pressing. The human race is facing the rapidly developing detrimental consequences of ever-increasing overuse of natural resources and massive urbanization. Some human activities result in irreversible environmental pollution, which reduces biodiversity and threatens fragile ecosystems.

We commend the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for convening the Climate Action Summit as a catalyst for collective political will to attain lower and, over time, climate-neutral levels of industrial greenhouse-gas emissions. This, the master message of the Summit, must ring out loudly from this, the highest of international tribunes. Bulgaria stands by its obligations under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. My country will spare no effort in transforming its economy in a way that will contribute to the common goal of keeping temperature rise to 1.5°C and reaching net-zero global emissions by 2050. Bulgaria has already reached the interim target of an 18 per cent share of renewable sources in its energy mix, thereby becoming a European Union (EU) champion.

This year, on 24 January, Secretary-General Guterres marked the first-ever International Day of Education, putting education at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Bulgaria wholeheartedly subscribes to his assessment that education is an engine for poverty eradication and a driving force for peace.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, Bulgaria is committed to the empowerment of children with disabilities through inclusive education. Inclusive education is an essential tool for the whole process of social inclusion. In a world driven by information and communication technologies, we place particular emphasis on the opportunities offered by education. In the coming years, the European Commissioner

in charge of the innovation, education and the youth sector will be from Bulgaria, which demonstrates the importance we attach to these priorities.

Global health is one of the major present-day global challenges we face. Bulgaria affirms its commitment to achieving universal health coverage, as set forth in our national priorities. We welcome the timely high-level meeting on the matter, as well as the political declaration on universal health coverage and its ambitious call to action.

The United Nations has a unique array of tools for mediation, conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. We welcome the Secretary-General's vision for a closely interlinked reform of all key areas in this most important field. Bulgaria welcomes the Secretary-General's commitment to advancing diplomacy for peace and stands ready to support his efforts to strengthen the role of mediation in conflict prevention, embodied in the Action for Peacekeeping initiative.

International terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a significant threat to international peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. The international community should beef up efforts to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation by supporting the United Nations as a key player. Unfortunately, over the past year, the international community has not been able to reach a breakthrough in any major conflict around the world. The proclaimed military victory over the so-called caliphate of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham last March was not enough to bring the war-torn Middle East region closer to the peace. The international community should stay vigilant, as terrorist threats persist in different forms.

Finding a political solution to the conflict in Syria is crucial for the stability and security of the region and beyond. We call for a nationwide cessation of hostilities and for the protection of civilians. It is imperative to ensure humanitarian access to all parts of the country. Under the auspices of the United Nations, a lasting political process aimed at a peaceful and inclusive political transition should be launched. A sustainable political solution should be sought through a genuine Syrian-owned political process in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Bulgaria highly appreciates the commitment of neighbouring host countries to easing the suffering of the refugees.

There is no military solution to the crisis in Libya. Bulgaria will continue to support the relaunching of the United Nations-led mediation process and preparations for parliamentary and presidential elections when possible. The stabilization of Libya is of the utmost importance for regional security and for the management of migration flows in the Mediterranean. Bulgaria supports close cooperation between the European Union and the International Organization for Migration aimed at increasing the number of voluntary returns and improving the conditions in detention centres in Libya.

Bulgaria will continue to support all efforts aimed at resuming the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, including those of the Quartet on the Middle East peace process. A two-State solution is the only way to sustainable peace.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is cause for great concern. It should remain a priority for the United Nations and the international community alike.

The five-year-long armed confrontation in Yemen has clearly shown that a durable and comprehensive solution to the conflict cannot be achieved by military means. The effective end of hostilities would allow for improving the catastrophic humanitarian situation. Bulgaria supports efforts to revive the political process as well as the full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement as a starting point for a peace settlement.

It has been more than five years since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. Despite periodic ceasefires, the situation in eastern Ukraine remains highly precarious. We call for a peaceful settlement of the crisis in accordance with resolution 68/262, of March 2014. The exchange of detainees is a sign of hope, but the parties to the conflict should implement in full the mutually agreed package of measures endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2202 (2015). It is of vital importance that they abide by the ceasefire, complete the withdrawal of heavy weapons and grant unhindered access to all sites to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission.

Bulgaria expresses deep concern about the decision of Iran to suspend the implementation of some of its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on its nuclear programme. A return to full compliance with the nuclear deal and further diplomatic outreach provide the only way to reduce tensions. Discussing Iran's regional role and

the country's ballistic-missile programme should be addressed separately from the JCPOA.

We are also seriously concerned by the recent escalation of tensions in the Persian Gulf. An immediate priority should be given to de-escalation measures aimed at avoiding further incidents.

The resumption of dialogue between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the encouraging sign of Pyongyang's readiness to engage in negotiations on denuclearization represent a qualitatively new phase in international efforts. It is vital that summit agreements be followed by actions yielding tangible results. Bulgaria reiterates its support for the strict and effective implementation of the sanctions regime, as well as for keeping the channels of communication open.

Multilateral efforts on non-proliferation and disarmament remain central. Next year we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which coincides with the 2020 NPT Review Conference. To keep up the momentum, we must reaffirm the validity of the Treaty as the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Bulgaria has consistently supported the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union. The process leading to membership is an investment in stability. Bulgaria puts a special emphasis on the need to overcome the legacies of the past in the region by actively building good-neighbourly relations.

Bulgaria welcomes all initiatives that benefit social and economic empowerment, especially that of persons belonging to vulnerable groups. As a member of the Human Rights Council, my country is dedicated to remaining active on such matters. I had the honour to address the Council in June and to confirm our commitment to champion the rights of those in need.

As a Chair of the Group of Friends of Children and the Sustainable Development Goals, and working together with UNICEF, we strictly follow our principles, and I would like to highlight that the family is the best environment for raising children. Bulgaria is a champion of deinstitutionalization.

Women around the world continue to be underrepresented in both Government and private entities. They still constitute the majority of the world's poor. I am proud that my country has an outstanding

record in the field of women's empowerment. Bulgaria is fully committed to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

Tolerance and understanding are values underpinning the very foundation of democracy. Regrettably, despite all efforts made, anti-Semitism continues today to rear its ugly head. The rescue of the entire Jewish population of Bulgaria in 1943 is one of the stellar moments in our history. In the darkest moments of the Second World War, not a single individual of the 50,000-strong Bulgarian Jewish community was sent to the death camps. My country provided an example of how civil society can defend human values. Our national tradition of tolerance and respect for others obliges us to provide a clear response to growing anti-Semitism, xenophobia and hate speech.

Next year will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. Strong messages mobilizing broad international approval and bold and prompt concerted actions are needed today more than ever before, and will certainly be needed tomorrow. The message I would like to convey to the Assembly is also my personal belief — our mission is possible, and we must see to it that it is achieved.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Bulgaria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bio: I wish to congratulate Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his assumption

of the responsibility to steer the work of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I assure him of Sierra Leone's full support during his tenure. I also applaud Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés of Ecuador for the effective manner in which she conducted the previous session. I also commend the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his overall dedication and commitment to the work of the Organization, including his efforts to advance the urgent need to address climate change.

We commit to our prayers memories of the late President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. He was a dedicated pan-Africanist whose pursuit of African integration, cooperation and solidarity shall forever remain in our minds and hearts.

The theme of the current session, "Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion", builds on the commitments we have made over the years. Those issues are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We therefore commend the timely choice of a theme that resonates with the aspirations of the people whom we all represent.

Sierra Leone supports the principle of collective engagement in both the prevention and settlement of conflicts and disputes, as well as the Secretary-General's reform agenda in sustaining peace in all its facets, including efforts to reform peacekeeping. As a troop- and police-contributing country, Sierra Leone's active participation in peacekeeping operations demonstrates our firm commitment to the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. Let me reiterate our firm commitment to continuing to contribute our fair share in maintaining world peace.

The need for Security Council reform is urgent and imperative. Our historic pledge to the early reform of the Security Council as an essential element of our overall effort to reform the United Nations must be upheld and implemented without further delay. The legitimacy and effectiveness of the Security Council's decisions and the relevance of the United Nations as a whole will continue to be questioned if urgent action is not taken to make the Council more broadly representative. Africa remains the only region without representation in the permanent category of the Security Council, and is also underrepresented in the non-permanent category.

In that context, Africa's demand for two permanent seats with all the rights and prerogatives of current

members, including the right of the veto, as well as two additional non-permanent seats, is a matter of common justice. Africa should have the right to an equal say in decision-making on issues pertaining to international peace and security. The long-standing injustice and imbalance perpetrated by the current configuration of the Security Council should be of grave concern to us all and ought to be addressed now.

As the Coordinator of the African Union Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government, which seeks the reform of the Security Council, we are convinced that such reform should address the long-standing injustice and imbalance of the current configuration of the Security Council. We believe that the prevailing geopolitical realities make a compelling case for a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in order to bring about equitable geographic representation. Africa's patience is being tested. We therefore urge the Assembly to collectively support our urgent call for Africa's representation on the Security Council, as espoused in the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We pursue peace as a public common good, and we have played an important role in securing peace as a stand-alone goal of the 2030 Agenda. There is a strong case to be made for the voices of billions of people living in conflict-affected countries to be heard in the highest global decision-making forum, in particular with regard to the Group of Seven Plus countries. Sierra Leone has always pursued country-led peace and resilience through national dialogue and reconciliation. We recently concluded a broad-based national consultative conference, Bintumani-III, during which a nationally representative body resolved to establish a permanent and independent national commission for peace and cohesion. We did so mindful that peaceful coexistence and inclusive governance are prerequisites for our development.

Development and poverty eradication must be well planned, inclusive and sustainable and must transition our nation out of fragility. To that end, Sierra Leone has partnered with United Nations agencies and development partners to better understand the dynamics and severity of poverty and map out possible approaches to eradicating poverty, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1. That culminated with the

production of a national multidimensional poverty index, a report on multidimensional child poverty and Sierra Leone's population policy, all with a view to ensuring effective measuring and monitoring capabilities.

The aspirations of Sierra Leoneans are reflected in a detailed and costed five-year medium-term national development plan, entitled Education for Development. The plan, which was aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063, is based on an inclusive national consultative process. It ensures that people are at the centre of, and own, our national development trajectory.

Eradicating poverty can be achieved only when we develop and improve our own greatest national resource — the people. Skilled, healthy and productive human beings represent the pathway to global success and prosperity. As a nation, we see human capital as a critical enabler for achieving the SDGs. My Government has therefore allocated 21 per cent of the national budget to education. Consequently, pre-primary to secondary school education is free, irrespective of gender, ability or ethnicity, and we now have 2 million children enrolled in school.

We have expanded opportunities in education for girls by creating safe spaces in schools, while campaigning vigorously against early marriage and sexual and gender-based violence. Girls admitted to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines in college are guaranteed scholarships. Technical and vocational education centres are now accessible to more Sierra Leonean girls and young people. We are also investing in more school infrastructure, transportation, sanitation and health, and nutrition and retention programmes.

We are restructuring and redesigning our education system to deliver quality education that meets the needs of inclusive and sustainable national and private-sector development. Our aim is to achieve fundamental, age-appropriate learning outcomes in literacy, computational skills and critical thinking. We invite the world to work with us. Through the directorate of science, technology and innovation, we have developed a human capital development incubator with extensive real-time data on education in Sierra Leone and other components of our human capital development flagship programme. Policy interventions and investments in education, health care and food security are increasingly informed and driven by that real-time data.

Sierra Leone continues to use the power of data to plan, make policy decisions, allocate resources, guide governance and create new possibilities for private entrepreneurship and drive human capital development. We are open to partnerships, collaboration and ideas about how to continue improving the quality of education, because we believe that our success in a global digital economy in the fourth industrial revolution is predicated on our investment in the future of our children.

Through partnerships and innovation, we have made great progress in establishing legal identity and birth registration by strengthening our national civil registration and vital statistics systems. We have also rolled out Africa's first blockchain national digital identity platform, which will help citizens obtain access to approved institutions by digitally verifying their identities. That initiative to establish legal identity using a singular, securitized and serially numbered instrument is guided by governance, development planning, financial inclusion and human rights imperatives, among others. The same instrument can also be used to strengthen health care planning, health information systems, disease surveillance and the monitoring of public health interventions and outcomes.

The threats of inequality, lack of opportunity and exclusion of our young people still persist. Anxiety over the growing population of young people in Africa is complicated by increased poverty indicators, the exclusion of young people, the perils of migration across the Mediterranean, transnational organized crime, terrorism, violent extremism and greater national and regional security threats. Sierra Leone is addressing the youth question through financial and social inclusion programmes, skills training and farming initiatives. We are pleased to be one of the 10 countries selected by the United Nations as pilots in the recently launched United Nations Youth Strategy. We aim to collaborate across the region and with international partners and to share lessons and best practices.

Our development agenda is inclusive and affirms the critical role of women. We have ratified Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. We are addressing the inclusion of women in governance and entrepreneurship. Our actions on child marriage, rape and sexual and gender-based violence have been emphatic and uncompromising. We have passed progressive laws on sexual offences and a presidential task force directly advises the President on

sexual and gender-based violence. We are also working to eliminate barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Quality, affordable and universal health care coverage is foundational to productivity and overall well-being. That is critical for our human capital development agenda. As a nation, we cannot afford the cost of not investing in health care and universal health care coverage. We have maintained a rights-based approach to health care coverage that is aligned with SDG 3. We are focused on, and request cooperation in, reducing maternal and child mortality; preventing epidemics of tropical and communicable diseases through increased disease detection, surveillance and control; providing primary health care in accordance with the Declaration of Astana; providing first-rate, in-country medical diagnostic facilities; and strengthening capacity and resilience in the delivery of health-care services.

Through all those efforts, we are leveraging innovation and technology to support the delivery of health care. We also believe that we cannot achieve universal health coverage without delivering mental health care for all. We are rewriting mental health legislation and are committed to community-based mental health care and treatment. We aim to change attitudes towards mental health and provide affordable and integrated quality care that matches the burden of mental health conditions. We therefore welcome partnerships with a view to achieving that goal.

Our focus as a Government remains the delivery of accountable and transparent State governance through critical debates and engagement with all citizens on their rights, governance and development. We continue to work with civil society and the press as we expand democratic space. My Government has forwarded to Parliament a bill to completely repeal a 54-year-old law that criminalizes libel, which has been used by Governments in the past to imprison journalists and restrict press freedoms.

As co-Chair of the Task Force on Access to Justice, Sierra Leone strongly identifies with, and reiterates, the Secretary-General's call for accelerated commitments to addressing gaps in the justice delivery system. We have signalled that commitment as a country by establishing a special directorate within the Ministry of Justice to monitor, evaluate and report on progress on access to justice for our most vulnerable groups. We

are also using technology and innovation to digitize our court processes and thereby fast-track justice delivery for all.

We have undertaken governance reforms that foster the rule of law and public accountability. And we continue to pursue a determined fight against corruption while minimizing the waste and abuse of State resources. We are also implementing business-friendly reforms that create an ecosystem that is conducive to private capital investment and entrepreneurship in our country.

Allow me to express my country's sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for convening the Climate Action Summit in September. Extreme weather events increase the risk of hunger, disease, forced migration, conflict and poverty. The science is indisputable, the effects on lives and livelihoods are real and the threats to our efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals are clear and present.

As a country, we are committed to a multilateral approach to fully implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Our medium-term national development plan provides for mitigation and adaptation strategies that include reviewing, formulating and strengthening national policy actions on environmental management and governance. We are committed to green and sustainable energy generation. With the right partnerships, the right attitude and an unflinching commitment to climate financing and continuing multilateral efforts, we can save our planet from the destructive impacts of climate change.

Allow me to conclude by encouraging us all to not lose sight of the shared responsibility we all have to ensure a peaceful and secure world for the next generation. Sierra Leone is a small nation, but it is determined to play its own part in the international system. We are committed to promoting peace and security, addressing the underlying causes of fragility and the drivers of conflict, tackling the scourge of climate change and, in turn, building resilience and achieving the 2030 Agenda. Together, we can achieve that in our lifetime.

The Acting President: (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Acting President: (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Tshilombo Tshisekedi: (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate Ambassador Tijjani Muhammad-Bande of Nigeria on his commendable election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I also congratulate the members of his Office and wish his entire team success in fulfilling their important mission. I would also like to pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres for his tireless efforts to support our Organization and strengthen its role in finding solutions to problems that threaten peace, security and prosperity in the world.

The theme of the current session, "Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion", has been well chosen at a particularly difficult time for multilateralism, when humankind has engaged itself with unprecedented momentum towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That theme encompasses the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development and the achievement of the objectives set out in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Inequality and feelings of exclusion are at the root of the main threats to peace, stability and harmonious development. They fuel the uncontrolled migration flows of entire peoples in search of a better future. In both northern and southern countries, they have

amplified xenophobic reflexes, the rise of populism and the radicalization of those that get left behind.

The tragic recent events in South Africa are the worst illustration of that. Such movements of popular frustration, which in some regions even go on to fuel terrorism, hold political debate hostage and prevent us from providing concerted responses to the problems that affect us all. I would like to tell the General Assembly that no country in the world can face those challenges alone. Unity, solidarity, tolerance and international cooperation are essential values, as reflected by our founding Members in the Charter of the United Nations.

More than ever, economic and social development and the well-being of the peoples of the world are fundamental and inalienable rights. As leaders, we have an obligation to work hard to guarantee those rights. For decades, our Organization has been striving to adapt to the new realities of our constantly changing world.

In order to be better able to meet the challenges of development in a globalized world in a sustainable way, we call for a comprehensive reform of the United Nations system, in particular the Security Council and the agencies of the United Nations. The Security Council reform process must be brought to completion and take into account the common African position, as set out in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration.

It is not fair for Africa to remain the only region in the world without permanent representation on the Security Council, while most of the world's demographic, social and environmental challenges are intrinsically linked to our continent. We want a fair and equitable configuration of the Security Council that is more representative of the diversity of the world's peoples and is accountable for its actions.

Despite the high-level commitments that we have made to creating the world we want by 2030, nearly 1 billion people in the world are still living in hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty, while 118 million people in extreme poverty will be exposed to drought, floods and heat in Africa by 2030. We cannot accept the mere suggestion of the possible failure to meet the 2030 commitments, especially after the very mixed outcome of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in Africa.

The eradication of poverty and hunger is urgent. The Democratic Republic of Congo can be part of the solution, with its 80 million hectares of arable land and

abundant water resources, capable of feeding more than 2 billion people.

The challenge of access to quality education for all, the second element of this session's theme, is of particular concern to us because the development experience in the decades since our independence has strengthened our conviction that there is no wealth but human beings. That is why since 2011, we had already embraced the key principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind through our commitment, well known to my compatriots, to put the people first. As a result, the main social priorities of my tenure are the following.

The first priority is to make primary education free as part of public education, as required by my country's Constitution. That commitment has been effective throughout the country since the beginning of this month. In one year, it will increase the share of education expenditure from 8 per cent to nearly 20 per cent of the State budget, that is, a level close to the standards recommended by UNESCO.

The second priority is to promote a better match between education and employment through an ambitious vocational and technical training approach, developed and implemented in partnership with the private sector.

The third priority is to advance the work on universal health coverage. We therefore hope that by the end of next year, more than 8 million more Congolese will have access to an effective health coverage system.

In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has just set out its national digital plan, whose implementation will have an impact on all sectors of public life. Moreover, the digitization of the economy will enable the country to make rapid progress in the fight against corruption and various economic crimes.

As our democracies have become particularly demanding and impatient, we must find innovative ways to implement our ambitions. I have therefore initiated an extensive emergency community development programme, which will serve as a driver to accelerate the reduction in socioeconomic and spatial inequalities within cities and territories. It will be a special multisectoral and integrated programme, which I personally will lead with a view to making up for some of the country's delayed progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The programme

will be supported structurally and financially by all our partners and assisted by the United Nations Development Programme. It seeks to increase people's access to basic social services, in particular by promoting rural micro-hydroelectric power plants, for which more than 700 sites have already been identified. The programme also seeks to develop human capital and to improve land connectivity through rural roads.

The socioeconomic development of humankind by 2030 must be sustainable or it will not be. In that regard, the fate of us all, rich or poor, is more closely linked than ever. With its natural resources and demographic strength, Africa has become key to that sustainability.

In such an Africa, nature has made my country the custodian of 47 per cent of the continent's forests, placing in it a major responsibility in addressing the challenges of our planet's survival.

I have already had to reiterate this on several occasions: it is vital and urgent to make available to our continent new sources of energy and new modes of production that are compatible with protecting the environment and affirming our inalienable right to development.

We are firmly committed to protecting our forests. However, the preservation of our natural heritage must not be at the expense of our development.

It is incomprehensible that the forests of the Congo Basin, which are the best preserved in the world, receive only 1 per cent of the available funding. It is essential that the entire international financial architecture, including the International Monetary Fund in its catalytic role in development financing, further integrate environmental considerations into its analysis of the macroeconomic criteria and challenges associated with its interventions in the different countries.

For our part, aware of the major role of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in that regard, our Government has relaunched dialogue with its main partners on environmental issues, in particular those within the Central Africa World Heritage Forest Initiative. In response to the Secretary-General's appeal, our Government has committed, through me, to increasing the level of its commitments under its nationally determined contribution and to continuing close cooperation among the countries of the subregion in order to speak with a single voice on all major issues related to forest conservation.

My Government has made the production of clean and renewable energy its foremost/top economic priorities for the five-year term.

Through aggressive investments and an attractive policy of protecting those investments, we can go from less than 10 per cent electrification at present to 60 per cent in the next 10 years, significantly reducing the consumption of firewood. Also, as part of the realization of our input energy mix, in order to strengthen the fight against deforestation, my Government encourages the development of domestic gas use in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

In the long term, we want to be the place on the planet where the electric kilowatt hour will be the cheapest thanks to harnessing/exploiting our capacity of more than 100,000 megawatts in hydroelectricity.

We are willing to further regulate logging and expand national reserves and parks to increase our biomass and protect our biodiversity. On the other hand, that can be achieved only with the effective implementation of an environmentally responsible industrialization strategy that focuses on production and consumption centres and generating jobs for our youth. Our population, with an average age of 17.5 years, is only slightly older than young Greta Thunberg, and they share some of her concerns and interests. But how will our young people engage in the same struggle when they have neither water nor light?

I have also decided to gradually transition my country out of an outdated agricultural system that has low productivity and is destroying our forest heritage. To that end, we will promote agroforestry that maximizes our comparative advantage for certain crops, with a focus on savannah areas. I intend to make the environmental issue a pervasive and cross-cutting concern in all our development policies, strategies, programmes and projects.

As I address the world from this rostrum for the first time, I must recall the special relationship between the Organization and my country. Above all, the relationship evokes in me a sense of gratitude. Indeed, the Democratic Republic of Congo has often been at the centre of the Organization's concerns owing to the many crises it has experienced since its independence.

From the tragic death of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and the many peacekeepers killed in action to the recent heinous assassination of United

Nations experts Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, the United Nations, more than any other international organization, has itself experienced the realities faced by millions of my compatriots. The United Nations and its various agencies have also deployed significant financial resources to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would therefore like to reiterate to the United Nations the gratitude of the Congolese people, who will never forget its support.

Nonetheless, I cannot help but regret that the history of my country is so painfully linked to the United Nations, which has deployed a peace mission there for 24 of the 59 years of our independence. Why, despite that long presence, have most hopes for peace and development been dashed? Beyond internal choices and responsibilities, my country and Africa cannot be seen in isolation from the rest of the world and the interests of others.

What would the Democratic Republic of the Congo's trajectory have been without the assassination of Patrice Émery Lumumba? What would have become of my country if it had been allowed to continue its peaceful post-Cold War democratic apprenticeship without being derailed by a war from without? I need not go so far back in time — every day we experience clashes of interests that explain, more often than not, the ongoing fragility of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The greatest challenge facing my country today is how to ensure peace, security and stability. Since our inauguration, convinced of the absolute necessity for peace, we have unreservedly committed to achieving that goal, taking into account its full regional and international dimension. With that in mind, last July at the thirty-ninth summit of the Southern African Development Community, held in Dar es Salaam, I proposed the creation of a regional coalition, modelled on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, to eradicate the scourge of insecurity created by armed groups of internal and external origin.

In the east of my country, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), our security forces are fighting back on a daily basis, determined to eradicate the negative forces that are spreading death and desolation among our population. Some of those rebel movements, including the Allied Democratic Forces, conduct terrorist activities that are

consistent with their allegiance to Da'esh, thereby posing a new threat to both my country and the subregion.

As if conflict and instability were not enough, for the past year the eastern Central African Republic has been suffering from an outbreak of the Ebola virus. Owing to the seriousness of the situation, last May I set up a technical unit under my supervision, composed of internationally renowned experts and led by my compatriot, Professor Jean-Jacques Muyembe-Tamfum, who identified the Ebola virus and whose research led to the discovery of mAb 114, a molecule used to treat that disease.

The new response strategy is beginning to have an impact, particularly in the city of Goma, which is now immune to the virus. Although much has been done, the epidemic has not yet been eradicated. In addition to the Ebola vaccine, the strategy will be bolstered by the introduction of five new approved drugs that will help to completely eliminate the scourge.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the outpouring of solidarity from our bilateral and multilateral partners, including the World Health Organization, the African Union, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, MONUSCO and many others. With particular regard to MONUSCO, at the present pivotal time for its future in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has been marked by the conduct of a strategic review, I would like first of all to reiterate the gratitude of the Congolese people to the contributing countries for the human and material sacrifices they have made for my country to date.

I note a convergence of views with the Secretary-General on the urgent need to readjust the configuration of MONUSCO to the changing situation on the ground by focusing more on the operational response capabilities of United Nations forces alongside the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo. In other words, the Democratic Republic of the Congo still needs MONUSCO, but a streamlined, well-equipped, robust MONUSCO, with an appropriate mandate, like the Rapid Intervention Brigade that once helped rout the Mouvement du 23 mars.

Like other developing countries, the Democratic Republic of Congo wishes to advance. We are convinced that, given its geostrategic position at the crossroads of the economic groupings of Central, South and East Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo should

opt for African integration as an engine of development and a vector of peace among nations.

That is why we have supported the project for an African continental free trade area, even as we are aware that it will be implemented in stages. That process will inevitably require the streamlining and dismantling of customs barriers. It is with that in mind that the Democratic Republic of the Congo intends to accelerate the implementation of an infrastructure development programme for its immense area of 2,345,000 square kilometres in order to link the country from east to west and north to south, facilitate the movement of goods and people and unlock the agricultural potential of our provinces.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo today holds about 70 per cent of the world's reserves of strategic metals, which are essential to achieving the energy and digital transition that humankind needs. Rather than using those natural mineral reserves as a source of monopolistic income, my country intends to open itself up to the world by allowing the regulated exploitation of its subsoil in exchange for support for industrialization and the production of batteries and higher value-added components. While the world has a thirst for cobalt, coltan and lithium, we in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have a need for industrial jobs, training and development.

My country also has 53 per cent of Africa's freshwater reserves. The sustainable management of that potential will one day help to quench the thirst of one quarter of the planet's inhabitants.

We are currently experiencing a profound crisis of the international liberal order. Rule by force serves only to engender frustration and violence, as illustrated by the recent attacks on oil installations in Saudi Arabia, raising fears of a conflagration in the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz that would paralyse the world economy. We have a duty to denounce any form of violent reaction to political problems that could be resolved through dialogue and consultation.

Are we ready to define a new world order in which Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo play a role bestowed on us by the changes that have taken place? I believe that a new path is possible — undoubtedly a very difficult, complex and demanding path that will require us to think outside the box.

My country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo — which recently held democratic and peaceful elections for the third time — has been fortunate enough to experience a peaceful and democratic transfer of power for the first time in its history, despite many outside observers painting a rather gloomy and pessimistic picture of the outcome of those elections. That historic victory is above all one of the Congolese people, whose heavy sacrifices in recent years have been rewarded by the successful holding of elections under high-risk circumstances.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the international community, in particular the Southern African Development Community countries, as well as Kenya, Egypt and the United States, which did not hesitate to encourage the giant step taken by my country in the process of building a State governed by the rule of law. Since my inauguration as President, I have been working to consolidate democratic progress by guaranteeing all rights and freedoms. No one is harassed for their opinions. The Democratic Republic of the Congo no longer has prisoners of conscience. None of our people feel the need to emigrate in order to save their lives or safeguard their security because of their individual political convictions or associations.

As far as gender mainstreaming is concerned, although we have yet to achieve full gender parity, I am pleased to say that progress has been made in that area across all sectors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By increasing the rate of participation of women from 6 per cent to 18 per cent, the current Government has achieved the highest level of female participation in my country's history. I have committed to making the issue of gender one of my political priorities.

At the regional level, I have engaged in intense diplomatic activities with a view to reaffirming my country's continued commitment to ensuring good-neighbourly relations and peaceful coexistence, with full respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other nations. In that regard, we African leaders must endow our continent with a voice of consensus and harmony, based on policies that are truly African.

Allow me to express my deep concern about what is happening in the Mediterranean Sea, where many people who are seeking to emigrate are dying every day in inhumane conditions. The waves of refugees and the shocking images we have seen over the past few years on the coast of Europe should challenge our

consciences as leaders. More than 500,000 migrants have tried to reach Europe via the Mediterranean since the beginning of 2015, and more than 5,000 of them have died during the crossing.

The seriousness of that disaster requires that we find urgent and effective solutions. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted in Marrakech in 2018, is our response to the migration crisis. We have a duty to draw up ambitious national initiatives as soon as possible with a view to implementing that agreement, but our best weapon is to strive for development, equity and stability around the world.

I issue a call from this rostrum for the full lifting of sanctions that have been affecting the Republic of Zimbabwe since 2002. Those sanctions are no longer justifiable at a time when that country has started a new chapter in its history and shown itself to be open to cooperating with the rest of the world. Upholding those sanctions is unfair — it hampers the country's attractiveness to foreign investment and affects not only Zimbabwe but also the entire region.

The absolute top priority of my work is to offer a perspective of dignity to our population, promote job creation — especially for young people — and combat insecurity and exclusion. The General Assembly, which wishes to reduce inequalities and build a more inclusive world, can be the advocate for those who have been left out. The challenge ahead of us is enormous, but what makes us human is our ability to find solutions — even those that seem most improbable — when necessary.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Igor Dodon, President of the Republic of Moldova

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Igor Dodon, President of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Igor Dodon, President of the Republic of Moldova, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Dodon (*spoke in Moldovan; English text provided by the delegation*): I have the honour to join the General Assembly and deliver my first speech from the most important rostrum of the United Nations. The accession of the Republic of Moldova to the United Nations, its active participation in all the institutions of the Organization and the opportunity to debate in this Hall the most important ideas, aspirations and problems are among the outstanding achievements of the people of the Republic of Moldova since 1991.

To begin with, I would like to congratulate Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session and to wish him much success in fulfilling his mandate. I also express my appreciation to Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for the wonderful work she did as President at the previous session.

I would like to take the opportunity of speaking before the Assembly to assure its members of the Republic of Moldova's full support for all the initiatives and projects launched recently by the United Nations, which are designed to solve the most complicated problems that humankind faces during what has been a tumultuous start to the century. I also take advantage of this opportunity to highlight not only the most pressing challenges currently facing the Republic of Moldova but also our vision regarding possible ways to solve them.

As is widely known, we are living at a time when the magnitude and number of protracted crises is constantly on the rise. Military conflicts and humanitarian crises, climate change and environmental degradation, excessive consumption of natural resources, economic imbalances and forcible and encouraged migration are real threats to the task of building a prosperous and peaceful world as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Against that backdrop, the role of the United Nations as guarantor of international peace and security, but also as a global platform for identifying common solutions to existing and emerging challenges, is paramount. Accordingly, we wish to express our support to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for the agenda of ambitious reforms that is

under way. We also wish to reaffirm our support to the preventive diplomacy he promotes with the aim of preventing crises and conflicts.

Just over a decade away from 2030, we note with regret that poverty, hunger, inequality and social exclusion continue to affect lives and, at the global level, to fuel new conflicts. The Republic of Moldova joins the common appeal, launched at the recent High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for the international community to accelerate its efforts to achieve the targets of the 2030 Agenda.

Through the 2030 Agenda, we are committed to promoting sustainable development based on respect for human rights. As in the past, the Republic of Moldova is determined to continue its contribution to fulfilling the important mandates of the Human Rights Council. In that context, and with regard to one particular social issue, I would like to point out that ensuring gender equality and empowering women are crucial aspects of accelerating sustainable development, since they boost economic growth and the well-being of families, communities and the State as a whole.

The Republic of Moldova has made remarkable progress recently in enhancing the role of women in decision-making. Women head the Parliament and the Government of the Republic of Moldova, as well as the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. They also represent 65 per cent of the members of Government and 25 per cent of the members of the national Parliament. We have also not forgotten the crucial role of women in any modern society — their role as mother and preserver of the family. In order to focus the State's attention on the need to protect and stimulate the creation and preservation of families, we decreed 2019 as the Year of the Family in the Republic of Moldova.

Climate change is a direct threat to humankind, and its effects are felt worldwide, affecting ecosystems, national economies and health-care systems. Of course, those phenomena affect my country as well. The Republic of Moldova expresses its solidarity with Mr. Guterres' call to intensify efforts to halt climate change. We are firmly convinced that the complex problems facing the peoples of the world can be solved only through joint international efforts. The realities of the current period indicate that even internal issues cannot be settled exclusively by the solitary efforts of one nation but only with the help of international partners — and that is especially the case for small

countries. The example of the Republic of Moldova is representative in that regard and, to a large extent, is relevant for many States around the world.

Over the 28 years since the declaration of our independence, my country's profile has seen some dramatic changes. During that period, the number of newborns has dropped threefold, the population remaining in the country has fallen by 30 per cent and some economic indicators have not even returned to their 1990 levels. Approximately 1 million citizens, or more than half of the economically active population, work abroad. The massive depopulation of the country has become a major problem and a real threat to the State's sustainability.

Our society's enormous investments in human capital and the education of the labour force have yielded almost no economic return — the country is losing the competition for its labour force and our people instead create added value and pay taxes elsewhere. The root cause of those bleak developments is of course a complex one, ranging from poor governance and endemic corruption in recent years to failures in economic or inter-ethnic policies.

However, from this rostrum, I will highlight what is, in my opinion, one of the key factors, which is positioning — the place of the Republic of Moldova and other regional States in the puzzle of policies and strategic interests of the major world Powers.

I dislike using military terms, and it is certainly not the most relevant analogy. However, it would be easy to characterize our situation using the term *terra nullius* in the context of the geopolitical confrontations in the region. It is notable that, although no shell has exploded in our territory since the military conflict along the Nistru River in 1992, the jockeying by major geopolitical players for better positioning in the region has never ceased. In all those years, there has been no consensus between the great Powers regarding the Republic of Moldova.

Our country is a multi-ethnic State and, by virtue of historical developments in recent centuries, the geopolitical preferences of our population are divided almost equally between East and West — between the Russian Federation and the West. That essential feature, which will remain a constant for a long time to come, has neutralized the effects of uninspired and even adventurous attempts to attract Moldova into alliances against others.

The country paid a high price when our politicians and national elites got involved in such dealings. First, bloodshed and disintegration followed the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the country. That was succeeded by economic and social degradation for several decades. Unfortunately, throughout the 28 years of the Republic of Moldova's independence, diametrically opposed geopolitical preferences have divided Moldovan society. That fact has been ably exploited by different political forces to serve exclusively interests that are alien to those of our people.

That is why, as President of the Republic of Moldova, I make use of every opportunity to request the de facto recognition and observance of my country's neutrality status, which is also enshrined in our Constitution. We do not want to be treated as a neutral territory anymore — which is a different designation from that of a neutral State. Any attempt to undermine that neutrality status is an unfriendly act against the people of the Republic of Moldova because it deepens the internal dissensions in the country even more dramatically. Moreover, such attempts jeopardize any chance of making progress in the settlement of the Transnistrian problem and thereby enhance security throughout the region. Our objective and absolute priority for solving the Transnistrian problem are achievable only if the Republic of Moldova preserves its military neutrality status.

On numerous occasions, calls for the withdrawal of foreign military troops and ammunition from the territory of the Republic of Moldova have been made from this very rostrum. I welcome the Russian Federation's latest initiatives, expressed during the recent visit to Moldova by the Russian Defence Minister, Mr. Sergey Shoigu, and the official visit to Moscow of the Moldovan Foreign Minister, Mr. Nicolae Popescu, on resuming the process of disposing the foreign ammunition stored in the Transnistrian region of our country. This important step, a first since 2003, could be instrumental in reaching a geopolitical consensus for the political settlement of the Transnistrian dispute and, more generally, for the enhancement of regional security.

Unlike other frozen conflicts, the Transnistrian case does not have interethnic, religious or other implications that are particularly difficult to settle. Moreover, nowadays there is no hatred between the inhabitants of the two banks of the Dniester River, who interact daily in a peaceful and friendly way. At the

root of the conflict were myopic policies promoted by the leaders of a previous era, aggravated by the effects of the dismantling of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The nation's elites were not capable enough to face the challenges before them, and the situation deteriorated into armed conflict.

Currently, we are witnessing a strong predisposition among the people to identify a mutually acceptable solution to this frozen conflict. Recent progress in the effort to bring the people of both Dniester banks together materialized through the emergence of humanitarian, economic and social projects, further strengthening the desire to settle the conflict. In our opinion, all of those aspects present a good chance for great diplomats to decisively contribute to settling the frozen conflict, creating thereby a positive precedent for solving other, similar tensions across the world.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my gratitude to all participants in the negotiation process in the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transnistrian Settlement in the 5+2 format. I reaffirm our confidence in that negotiating format, as it is the arrangement most likely to yield an acceptable solution to a problem that is of major importance to Moldova. Under the format, the special status of the Transnistrian region, within the internationally recognized borders of a sovereign and territorially integrated Moldova that guarantees full human rights and fundamental freedoms to its people, is to be debated and agreed. We also rely on the format to identify possible support from our foreign partners in the post-settlement phase of the Transnistrian problem.

The Republic of Moldova has been governed since 8 June by a parliamentary coalition consisting of political parties that represent the vast majority of the country's population. It is a unique case in the history of the Republic of Moldova for two political forces with diametrically opposed doctrines and geopolitical preferences to join forces to govern and solve the pressing problems of the country. However, what is important and unprecedented for our region is that this domestic consensus is strengthened by the common position of the country's main development partners and of the great world Powers, including the Russian Federation, the United States and the European Union (EU). It is an unusual case in international politics for geopolitical forces to unite their efforts against a criminal regime that had captured an entire State.

This very rare situation, involving a special moment of agreement, at both the domestic and the international level, fuels our hopes for real progress on the path towards developing such needed internal reforms as justice reform and the fight against corruption, as well as the way the Transnistrian problem is to be solved.

One of the unifying elements of the current governing coalition in the Republic of Moldova is an awareness of the importance of and willingness to promote a balanced foreign policy with all of the country's strategic partners. The representatives of both political parties in the parliamentary majority have already established a constructive dialogue with Eastern and Western partners, essentially increasing our chances of obtaining the external support that we need. A common approach to respecting all political and economic agreements signed by the Republic of Moldova, including the Association Agreement with the EU and our cooperation with States of the Commonwealth of Independent States, is in place.

A distinguished place in our agenda is reserved for the Republic of Moldova's relations with our neighbours and friends Romania and Ukraine. Faced with similar problems, all three of us seek to deepen our humanitarian, economic, political and social ties and explore our enormous development potential for the benefit of all our citizens. Before the new governing coalition came to power, and before the great geopolitical forces began to support the democratic changes in Chisinau, the main challenge had been whether we would really show sufficient political maturity to go further than just freeing the State from the hands of oligarchs. I am firmly convinced that this unprecedented domestic and foreign consensus could and should be used by all of us to make real changes in the quality of life for our citizens, find a solution to the Transnistrian problem and give the Republic of Moldova a new chance to prosper.

The Republic of Moldova is a multi-ethnic country inhabited by representatives of approximately 125 ethnic groups. A third of the population considers itself Russian-speaking. In Moldova the Russian language, one of the six official languages of the United Nations, is considered to be the language of interethnic communication. As President of the Republic, I believe that the main task before the recently formed parliamentary majority, which is supported by 80 per cent of the country's population and by our Western and Eastern strategic partners, is to create a single legal,

democratic, mutual multi-ethnic State that ensures every inhabitant with a decent standard of living and justified confidence in the future.

We will be on friendly terms and interact well with all of our partners. The either/or policy with respect to the Republic of Moldova, pursued in recent years by a number of major Powers, has clearly been revealed as empty and inadequate. I support the concept of a united Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok, where Moldova, as a European State, will play a special role.

Let me re-emphasize that, as the Head of State, I am an active supporter of a balanced foreign policy for my country and I am ready to comprehensively promote mutually beneficial cooperation with all States Members of the United Nations with which we have established diplomatic relations. For the Moldovan people and the peoples of other Member States, peace is the main value. We strive to ensure peaceful coexistence with our neighbours and good relations with our development partners.

Our intention is to strengthen the stability and security of the Republic of Moldova, maintain the constitutional status of permanent neutrality of our State and strive for its recognition at the international level, following the model of such countries as Austria. In that context, the example of military neutrality of certain States like Austria can be a relevant model for the Republic of Moldova. However, neutrality does not mean isolation. Moldova will therefore continue to strengthen its multilateral cooperation with Russia, the United States, the European Union, its neighbours and other States.

I believe that the key to success lies in promoting the concept of the internationally recognized military neutrality of the Republic of Moldova, completing the removal and disposal of ammunition left in the territory since the Soviet era and the full and final withdrawal of foreign troops from the State that I have the honour to represent at this high tribunal. Upon reaching the final political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, there will be no need for a peacekeeping mission in our territory.

As my address draws to a close, I want to emphasize once again the importance of maintaining the consensus of the main geopolitical actors with regard to the Republic of Moldova. Only in such circumstances can we improve the chances of solving the severe problems facing my country, including the Transnistrian problem.

I am very confident that such an effort, with the support of the Russian Federation and the West, could radically change the profile of my country, about which I spoke with such great concern at the beginning of my address.

I reaffirm the commitment of the Republic of Moldova to approaches the United Nations is taking with respect to the main problems humankind faces today. The Republic of Moldova remains firmly committed to observing the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the vision of sustainable development that is anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Our determination is based on our full awareness of the imperative of forging solidarity among nations in the face of modern challenges. We are a few hundred peoples and countries, but we have one planet — one home — which we must care for together, regardless of our place under the sun.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Moldova for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Igor Dodon, President of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

Address by Mr. Daniel Kablan Duncan, Vice-President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Daniel Kablan Duncan, Vice-President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Daniel Kablan Duncan, Vice-President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Duncan (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, His Excellency Mr. Alassane Ouattara, I would like to extend our warm congratulations to the President on his

election to lead the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session and to wish him every success in the conduct of his mandate. His election is a true source of pride for his country, Nigeria, for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and beyond, indeed, for the entire African continent. We also congratulate his predecessor, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for her outstanding leadership during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, which was a great success. Finally, allow me to pay a special tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his leadership and commitment to peace and development worldwide.

The theme of this year's general debate, "Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion", underlines the importance that every Member State should attach to multilateralism as a key tool for collectively addressing the major contemporary challenges. However, the multilateralism enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations is today under strong pressure, which jeopardizes the many achievements of dialogue and international cooperation. That is why, given the scale of the current challenges, including the persistence of antagonisms and the temptation of unilateralism, we must renew our unwavering commitment to multilateralism, which, since the creation of the United Nations, has proven its effectiveness in the quest for peace and stability in the world.

Côte d'Ivoire therefore welcomes the adoption in the General Assembly by a large majority, on 12 December 2018, of resolution 73/127, establishing 24 April as the "International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace", beginning in 2019. The resolution invites us to reclaim the three pillars of United Nations action — peace and security, development and human rights. Côte d'Ivoire's accession to the various initiatives for building a better world, in particular the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063, on sustainable and inclusive development, is a testament to its commitment to strengthening regional and international partnerships.

Four years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the challenges and issues remain the same — the persistence of hunger, malnutrition and poverty in the world; the increasingly worrisome impact of climate change; migration crises, with their socioeconomic effects on migrants' countries of origin and destination; and exclusion of all kinds.

Those challenges require us to act in synergy with greater speed and determination.

As part of its strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda, Côte d'Ivoire has included the Sustainable Development Goals in its national development plan, as well as in its sectoral and local policies, and allocates a significant part of its budget to them. Indeed, President Ouattara has made improving people's living and working conditions a priority. Accordingly, through budgetary leverage, Côte d'Ivoire increased the level of spending on the poor from \$1.7 billion in 2011 to \$5 billion in 2019. In other words, it has tripled in eight years.

In the same vein, Côte d'Ivoire declared the year 2019 to a year to strengthen social momentum through the roll-out of a major social programme over the 2019 to 2020 period, with a cost of \$1.45 billion, subsequently raised to \$2 billion. In addition, universal health coverage, introduced in 2014, will be extended next year, and a programme of productive social safety nets will be implemented in collaboration with the World Bank, at a cost of \$150 million, which will enable 125,000 households to receive regular income over the 2015 to 2024 period. All of those actions, which are in support of the various sectoral plans for electricity, health, nutrition, education, training, drinking water, housing, sanitation and social protection, have made it possible to make significant progress on those main social issues, leading to a significant reduction in the poverty rate. However, all those poverty-reduction strategies can produce the desired results only if they are supported by adequate funding from stakeholders, in particular the United Nations system.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the celebration, on 24 January 2019, of the very first International Day of Education, established by the General Assembly in 2018. Education, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, is indeed one of the responses to major contemporary problems and to the challenges of transforming our societies. In that context, priority must be given to investment in human capital, through education, training, literacy programmes, capacity-building and regular skills acquisition. To that end, the Ivorian Government has introduced free public primary education and education kits and made schooling compulsory across the country for children aged between 6 and 16. Doing so required massive recruitment of teaching staff and an expansion of school and university infrastructure. In addition, our

strategic literacy plan, covering the period 2019 to 2024, is aimed at significantly reducing the illiteracy rate to less than 10 per cent by 2024.

It should be stressed that African countries can reduce social inequalities, especially gender inequalities, and make up lost ground only if they have well-trained and well-nourished men and women. Our people will also need to be in good health and have easy access to innovation and information and communication technologies as a strategic tool for accelerating their development. In that context, UNESCO should play a more prominent role in improving our education systems, because only by offering our people, and our young people in particular, opportunities to forge a future can we contribute to tackling such scourges as illegal immigration, drugs, organized crime, youth radicalization, terrorism, obscurantism, unemployment, marginalization on the basis of social inequality and, particularly, gender inequality.

The effects of climate change are increasingly being felt in all regions of the world on a general scale, and in developing countries such as Côte d'Ivoire in particular. The main consequences of the shifts brought about by climate change are drought, deforestation, coastal erosion, natural disasters, declining agricultural yields, the displacement of populations and the consequent abandonment of livelihoods. Climate change threatens entire ecosystems that support food and nutritional systems for hundreds of millions of people, degrading the soil and thereby reducing the nutritional value of the food we grow. It also has a disruptive impact on water and sanitation systems. All of those consequences pose a major threat to both the health of our populations and the food and nutritional security of our societies. That is one of the greatest challenges facing present and future generations.

We must also promote a green economy that centres around protecting ecosystems, promoting clean technologies and improving the productivity of our resources. In that context, it is more crucial than ever to ensure the effective and prompt implementation of the international commitments made at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and to adopt a global pact for the environment in the near future.

For its part, Côte d'Ivoire will resolutely respect its climate commitments within the framework of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which was

adopted in 2015. To that end, our country has pledged to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions by 28 per cent by 2030, relying on the energy, transport, agriculture and waste-management sectors to do so. Particular emphasis has therefore been placed on the transition to renewable energies, the development of a circular economy and sustainable forest management, with a view to achieving 20 per cent national forest coverage between 2030 and 2035. In that context, the Government adopted its 2015 to 2020 national strategy to combat climate change — in order to include this particular theme in its sectoral policies. Accordingly, both developed and emerging countries should be invited, within the limits of their responsibilities, to contribute further to mobilizing financial resources pursuant to the recommendations of the 2015 Paris Agreement.

The persistence of many conflicts around the world, the resurgence of terrorism and mass crimes, and the ongoing threat posed by weapons of mass destruction unfortunately jeopardize the achievement of our ambitious development programmes. It is well known that there can be no development without security and peace — both are prerequisites for sustainable development. Sadly, many hotbeds of tension persist across Africa, particularly in North and West Africa. A number of terrorist groups continue to cause significant loss of human life, not to mention destruction of infrastructure, thereby contributing to the weakening of peace and stability in several countries.

No sustainable solution to the challenges I have mentioned can be envisaged without a global approach taken within a multilateral framework and with the collaboration of all. That is the meaning of the undertaking made at the Extraordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS on Terrorism, held on 14 September in Ouagadougou, where the leaders of ECOWAS, Mauritania and Chad committed to a \$1 billion four-year plan of action to contribute to defeating terrorism in both West Africa and the Lake Chad basin.

As Côte d'Ivoire prepares for the end of its term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, my country reiterates its commitment to peace, security and development within the other organs of the United Nations, with a view to harnessing the experience gained and the core values that underpin its diplomatic efforts.

In conclusion, I applaud our shared determination to work in full synergy to address the many challenges

of today and tomorrow, in order to ensure a world of peace and shared prosperity for all peoples.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Daniel Kablan Duncan, Vice-President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the State of Palestine.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Abbas (*spoke in Arabic*): Four generations of our people have been waiting with hope. Beware, beware and beware of making them lose that hope. I trust that the General Assembly will not make them lose their hope.

A week prior to the recent Israeli elections, Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu, arrogantly announced that, should he prevail in the elections, he would annex and apply Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley, the northern Dead Sea and Israel's colonial settlements, despite the fact that all of those areas are occupied Palestinian territory. We categorically reject that announcement. If any Israeli Government were to proceed with the announced plan, our response would be that all signed agreements with the Government of the occupation and any obligations therein will be terminated, in line with previous decisions we have taken in that regard.

We have the right to defend our rights by all possible means, regardless of the consequences, while remaining committed to international law and to combating terrorism. Our hand will remain extended for achieving peace through negotiations. However,

anything else will be null and void if Israel or any Israeli Government — that of Mr. Netanyahu or of any other person — implements the plan announced a few days ago. In that regard, I thank all leaders, countries and international organizations that condemned or rejected that announcement and the settlement activities as a whole, which are serious violations of United Nations resolutions and international law. We thank them all. They have reaffirmed that the Palestinian question remains the first central issue for the entire world, despite desperate attempts to divert attention away from the question.

I ask members of the Assembly: what would they do if someone attempted to take their countries' land and erase their presence on it? How would they react? It is time for the international community to shoulder its responsibilities in order to bring an end to the Israeli aggression and arrogance. It is time to implement at least one resolution adopted by the United Nations on this issue. Otherwise, all of those resolutions are useless.

I had hoped to come to the Assembly this year to proclaim together the end of the Israeli occupation of my country, Palestine. But, regrettably, I stand before the Assembly today bearing the same concerns and pain that have been endured for so long by my people, who, despite all the injustice, oppression and occupation they have suffered, continue hoping to achieve their freedom and independence, as all other nations of the world. I ask the Assembly once again: has the time not come to save the Palestinian people and emancipate them from injustice, oppression and occupation? Has the time not come? I hope that Assembly members would ask themselves that question.

The General Assembly granted the State of Palestine observer State status in 2012. We are grateful for that legal and moral stance. We thank the United Nations for standing by our just requests to end the Israeli occupation of the land of the State of Palestine and for the State of Palestine to achieve its full independence, based on the 4 June 1967 borders, along with a just and comprehensive solution to the issue of the Palestinian refugees, whose plight has been prolonged. We thank the United Nations for its stance and hope that it is implemented and translated into action on the ground.

We also convey our greeting and appreciation to all the countries and the peoples that continue to provide support and assistance to our people and our country, politically and economically, with a view to ending

the occupation and building our national institutions. We also thank them for their continued support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), pending a just and comprehensive solution to the plight of our refugees, in line with international law. UNRWA was established in 1949 to help Palestinians address their problems, despite the fact that regrettably some have halted their assistance to UNRWA while its mission has not ended.

We are proud that the State of Palestine, despite all obstacles and policies of the Israeli occupation and its supporters, has become a full-fledged member of more than 110 organizations and international treaties. It has received the recognition of 140 States from around the world. The State of Palestine chaired the Group of 77 and China this year. It continues to competently assume its responsibilities at the regional and international levels as a resilient and constructive member of the international family. It deserves to be a full-fledged Member of the United Nations and all of its agencies. I believe that after all this we deserve to be a full-fledged Member. I do not know a single reason why we do not deserve it.

We have accepted international legitimacy and international law for resolving our question. We have sought and continue to seek, just and comprehensive peace. But the international law we have accepted and adhered to and the peace for which we strive are now in severe jeopardy, as a result of Israel's policies and practices in our occupied land and the fact that it has reneged on agreements it has signed, since the Oslo Accords in 1993 to date. The responsibility for defending peace and international law is incumbent upon the members of the Assembly. Israel has not implemented any of the agreements. We hope that the Assembly compels Israel to respect international legitimacy.

The occupying Power is waging a reckless racist war in Jerusalem against everything that is Palestinian: from the confiscation and demolition of homes to assaults on clergymen; to the eviction of our citizens from their homes; to attempts to violate the sanctity of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; to the adoption of racist laws, such as the Jewish nation-State law. We all thought that those laws ended with apartheid in the former South Africa. Apartheid and racial discrimination are gone. Today we can see that similar laws still exist. One such law in Israel discriminates against people based on their religion and race, while the world remains silent.

Israel also denies worshippers access to the holy sites. I caution against those policies and reckless measures, which lead to dangerous consequences. The result will be a religious war. We want to avoid such a war, but Israel is making every effort to wage one.

A few months ago, Israel has started to arbitrarily confiscate a portion of our funds, leading to additional suffering of our people. We therefore have not been able to meet our financial obligations towards our citizens. That exacerbates the economic crisis in our country due to a lack of resources and the decision of some parties and countries to not fulfil their commitments towards us. Nevertheless, the Palestinian people will not surrender to the Israeli occupation, regardless of the circumstances and no matter the pain we endure. We will remain steadfast on our land, resisting occupation by all available peaceful means. That is our legitimate right and our national and moral obligation. Let everyone know that occupation cannot bring about peace, security or stability for anyone. Israel must not think that it can achieve peace through occupation. That will not happen.

What is unfortunate and shocking is that the United States of America — a permanent member of the Security Council — is supporting the Israeli aggression against us, reneging on its international legal, political and moral obligations instead of maintaining international peace and security and upholding United Nations resolutions. The United States has even undertaken extremely aggressive and illegal measures, declaring Jerusalem the capital of the State of Israel and moving its Embassy there, in blatant provocation of the sentiments of hundreds of millions of Muslims and Christians, for whom Jerusalem is a central part of their religious faith. Despite all of those measures, Jerusalem will remain the eternal capital of Palestine, whether they like it or not.

The United States Administration did not stop there. It also decided to close the office of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Washington, D.C., for no reason. Some of its officials — in particular its Ambassador in Tel Aviv — have claimed that the Israeli settlements on our occupied territory are legitimate. They have decided that it is no longer an occupied territory, but an Israeli territory where Israel can build whatever facility it wishes. That was stated by the American Ambassador to Israel. Must we adhere to that statement? No. We will not follow the words of the

United States and its Ambassadors. They do not shape our destiny.

Moreover, the United States has immorally and inhumanely terminated all of its contributions to UNRWA, then speaks about the so-called deal of the century, suggesting deceptive and elusive economic solutions after having destroyed, through its own policies and measures, all possibilities of achieving peace. I challenge the United States to show us anything but the deal of the century that it announced and which we totally reject.

The policy of the United States has emboldened the Government of the Israeli occupation to renege all signed agreements with us and all its commitments to peace, depriving the peace process of any credibility and causing many Palestinians to lose faith in achieving the desired peace. It has jeopardized the two-State solution, and now many are wondering if the two-State solution has become impossible. Many people ask: can there be a one-State solution where everyone may live with the other equally? Some are starting to wonder. They are witnessing Israel seizing lands and destroying the two-State solution, and are therefore asking whether it is possible to have a one-State solution. Let me reaffirm that I am in favour of a two-State solution, which is the only solution. That is in line with international legitimacy and international resolutions. Even the United States adopted resolution 2334 (2016). That is the resolution I want to be implemented. I will not accept a one-State solution. I will not accept apartheid. We want a two-State solution based on international legitimacy.

On our part, we have never missed an opportunity to hold serious negotiations with the Israeli side. We have constructively engaged in all initiatives. However, Mr. Netanyahu has never agreed to or accepted negotiations behind closed doors on a bilateral or multilateral basis. We have both received several invitations from several countries to meet on their land and start the negotiation process. He has rejected them all — including the latest invitation from the Russian Federation, of which there have been three — claiming that Palestine does not want peace or negotiations. We say that we will always be ready to welcome peace with open arms, and we are convinced that peace will be achieved only through negotiations.

Despite all of this, I renew our call for convening an international peace conference in line with the initiative I presented before the Security Council in February

2018 (see S/PV.8183) with the participation of the Arab countries, States members of the European Union and the Middle East Quartet. They can all participate in the conference to reach a solution, as can the permanent members of the Security Council, so that we reach a plan based on international consensus and the relevant United Nations resolutions, with a defined time frame so as to end the occupation, achieve the independence of our State and end the conflict. That is what we are asking for.

To be frank, we categorically reject any negotiations shepherded by any one country, whether it be the United States or any other country. We reject negotiations led by a single country. Such negotiations must be held under the auspices of the United Nations. We would consider the United States, or any other country wishing to hold their own negotiations, as biased. However, including the Quartet or other countries would be acceptable. I am not solely referring to the United States; the same applies to any one country. We will not accept mediation by the United States alone.

From the outset, we have believed in democracy, which is enshrined in our Constitution, as a foundation for building our State and society. We have demonstrated that on the ground by holding elections in 1996, 2005 and 2006. However, they came to a halt in 2007 due to the Hamas coup. Since then, we have called for reconciliation and the holding of elections. Nevertheless, when I return to the homeland, I will call for general elections in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. Anyone opposing those elections will be held accountable before God, the international community and history.

Our steadfast position is to fight terrorism, and we always say that we can relinquish anything but will never give up in our fight against terrorism. We have adopted 83 protocols with 83 countries, including the United States, to combat international terrorism. We would like to take this occasion, in the aftermath of the recent attacks on the city of Dhahran and oil facilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to condemn them and express our solidarity with that country, while supporting its position.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to, and express my pride in, our Palestinian people — in Palestine, the refugee camps, the diaspora and throughout the world. I say to them that we are confident that this occupation, like every other occupation before it, will inevitably

end. Many countries have been occupied, including the United States, which was occupied by a number of countries. However, the occupation came to end in Europe, Africa and Latin America. We say that our occupation will come to an end as other occupations have ended.

We will continue to call for our rights. A right is never lost as long as someone strives to claim it. We pay tribute to our honourable martyrs, courageous prisoners and their resilient and patient families, whose rights we will protect regardless of the cost. I will not submit to Israel's demands. Even if I had only one penny left, I would give it to the families of the martyrs, prisoners and wounded. I will not prevent them from getting it.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the State of Palestine for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Address by Mrs. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Mrs. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and to invite here to address the Assembly.

President Zewde (*spoke in Amharic: English text provided by the delegation*): We are facing unprecedented challenges. Climate change is real and poses a real threat to progress, and even to our survival, forcing us to shift resources away from development. Threats to global peace and security are multiplying. Geopolitical and trade tensions, arms races, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, violent extremism, poverty and income inequality are all global challenges that require global

solutions. Committing to multilateralism has never been more urgently needed. The theme of this year's general debate could not be more appropriate.

Since Ethiopia's political transition in April 2018, we have launched major political, legal and economic reforms. We have enlarged the political space, releasing jailed political prisoners and journalists; inviting exiled political parties to return home and pursue their peaceful struggle; revising electoral, counter-terrorism and civil society laws; and ending the 20-year conflict with Eritrea.

As we look forward to next year's elections, those reforms, particularly the expansion of the political space, have built a solid foundation for a lasting democratic order. We have also initiated the liberalization of our economy, building on a decade of sustained growth. We recently launched the homegrown economic reform agenda aimed at addressing emerging macroeconomic imbalances, resolving structural bottlenecks, including the ease of doing business to stimulate private sector growth, and creating new opportunities.

Inclusivity has been a core element of our policy, and we have made job creation for young people the epicentre of reforms. We are taking firm steps towards institutionalizing those reforms, while addressing the huge gap in gender parity, including at the highest levels of Government.

If members were to close their eyes and think of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session, who among them would have thought that a woman from Africa would be standing here to address the Assembly? It has not been easy, but we have laid down a firm foundation for development in Ethiopia and durable peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. The rapprochement with Eritrea was a clear demonstration of the capacity of Africans to solve their problems through constructive dialogue. We are working to transform the whole region into an inclusive zone of peace and prosperity, and we are confident that the international community will support us.

In the Sudan, the formation of a Government of National Unity based on last month's political agreement is a very encouraging development. The negotiating parties showed faith in the mediation efforts of Ethiopia and the African Union. The new leadership deserves the full backing of the international community in its efforts to revive the country's economy. We strongly support the lifting of all economic and financial

sanctions on the Sudan, including removing the Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism.

Somalia has come a long way in recent years and is now consolidating State institutions, with elections scheduled for 2020. At the same time, Al-Shabaab remains a serious danger to Somalia and to the wider region. Any reversal of the progress made through the enormous sacrifices of the African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMISOM) and the Somali national forces must be prevented. In this regard, sustainable financing and support for AMISOM remains critical. Our partners must recognize this and reaffirm their commitments.

With the recent meeting between President Kiir and Mr. Machar, the South Sudanese parties have taken encouraging steps towards the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan. The parties should continue to show a strong commitment to increase the momentum for the full implementation of all the pre-transition objectives set forth in the agreement. We hope that the international community will redouble its efforts to deliver on the support pledged.

Ethiopia has been resolute in defending global peace and security through our contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations for 70 years. I am proud to say that Ethiopia is now the leading troop-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping. Our troops discharge their responsibilities with the highest levels of professionalism, dedication and courage. We are currently working to strengthen the efficiency and accountability of peacekeepers, increase the role of women in peace and security activities, implement the global and regional security architecture and ensure sustainable financing for African-led peace-support operations.

In that context, let me also underline our support for Security Council reform. Africa must be permanently represented in the Security Council.

Ethiopia has started to register some encouraging initial results on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We are investing in our people, our human resources, to improve their well-being. We are expanding manufacturing and infrastructure to attract an increasing amount of domestic and foreign investment. To create jobs for our youth, we are privatizing State-owned enterprises. To finance our national projects, we are mobilizing domestic resources and integrating pro-poor policies. To reduce poverty

and enhance the quality of life, we are sustaining rapid and inclusive economic growth. Ethiopia is expected to be the fastest-growing economy this year. We are in the process of mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into upcoming five-year national development plans and into a long-term-perspective development plan for the next decade.

Ensuring access to quality education means less child labour, less exploitation and fewer child marriages. Indeed, we have just launched the Ethiopian education development road map. Building on our significant progress over two decades, the road map focuses on out-of-school children. Many of those children are from pastoralist or disadvantaged areas, groups with special needs or the physically disabled. The road map provides for strengthening alternative modes of delivery. It also focuses on girls, as they are still less likely to complete primary education, and on equality, addressing the barriers to education in the classroom or at home. We are increasing education spending significantly; we hope that donors live up to their commitments and target and deliver aid more effectively.

My country, with more than 100 million people, is perpetually affected by climate-induced drought. It is high time to act, urgently and decisively. That is why Ethiopia has agreed to co-lead the energy transition workstream for the Climate Action Summit.

We in Ethiopia are working on afforestation, with a 10-year forest-sector development programme, a master plan to promote sustainable and productive forestry for green economic growth. This includes plans to plant 4 billion seedlings within a year and a half, under the theme “40 Trees per Head for New Ethiopia”, a project launched in May by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Last month we broke the world record, planting more than 350 million trees in a single day.

Ethiopia’s main aspiration is to lift our people out of poverty. We are striving to provide a dignified life for all our citizens. The central element of our vision for sustainable development includes building infrastructure and harnessing our national resources. However, the grim reality today is that nearly 65 million Ethiopians do not have access to electricity. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile is merely to generate hydroelectric power to offer our people the opportunity to at least to have supper with a light on.

The Nile basin countries enjoy one of the oldest relationships in human history. We are inseparably linked by civilizations and this great and noble river. The seeds of our common development were planted thousands of years ago. Our time-tested links through the Nile, which provides us with life, truth and faith, can deliver a new level of energy and commitment for the betterment of our peoples. The use of the Nile waters also offers a unique opportunity for transboundary cooperation among the sisterly countries of the region. It should never be an object of competition or mistrust. Ethiopia strongly believes that the use of the Nile River should be based on the principles of international law, namely, the principles of the equitable and reasonable use of natural resources and the importance of causing no significant harm.

We have always been eager and committed to the establishment of a multilateral legal regime on the basin-wide use of the river. The Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement, signed in May 2010 after 13 years of negotiations, was our first and only truly inclusive multilateral treaty in this area. The consultations, negotiations, and signing of the Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam are a testament to Ethiopia’s commitment to cooperation, in line with the Cooperative Framework Agreement.

The remaining technical matters regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam should be left to our experts. In this regard, the technical ministries of Ethiopia, the Sudan and Egypt met earlier this month in Cairo and will reconvene at the end of September and early October in Khartoum. We should encourage and give our fullest support to the technical experts to produce a scientific- and evidence-based recommendation. As we have always said, combined efforts in the Nile Basin are not an option but a necessity for win-win cooperation and successful mutual interdependence among the Nile Basin countries.

We are fully committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. From our own experience, we know that maintaining peace and security, reducing poverty and achieving prosperity are attainable. The world has the resources, capabilities and capacity to preserve our planet, but time is truly running out. We must accelerate the processes to implement and deliver on commitments, avoid leaving anyone behind and provide the policies needed for

employment, development, peace and security. Above all, we must work towards a multinational global environment in which all our concerns and interests are taken into account and we can move forward together to achieve our goal of collective security and prosperity.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

Address by Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by the President of the European Council.

Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Tusk (European Council): Over the past five years, I have had the honour of representing the European Union (EU) as the President of the European Council, which comprises the Heads of State and Government of its member States. I have also come to the United Nations in that capacity.

Please allow me, in my address today, my last one in this Hall, not to elaborate on the details of our challenges, but to start with a more general reflection inspired by words that were spoken here two days ago, words suggesting an immanent conflict between patriotism and globalism. I do not agree with this assessment. It is false and dangerous, even if it has many followers and powerful propagators.

The very idea of the United Nations, just like that of the European Union, is a de facto heroic attempt to overcome such thinking. The patriotism of the twenty-

first century must also have a global dimension, if it is to avoid becoming, as has been the case many times, a common national egoism. The history of our nations shows how easy it is to transform the love of one's homeland into a hatred towards one's neighbours; to transform the pride for one's own culture into contempt for the culture of strangers; and to use the slogans of one's own sovereignty against the sovereignty of others.

I know that the word "globalism" does not sound attractive. Personally, I prefer the word "solidarity", which is so important to me and to my nation. In my political vocabulary, globalism and solidarity mean the same thing. I am not talking about some naive ideology or abstract linguistics but about concrete challenges and the opportunity for pragmatic solutions.

I love Gdansk, the town I come from. I love Poland, my country, and I love Europe. But even if we live in the most beautiful and most modern European city, our life can become hell if we do not find, here at the United Nations, adequate solutions to global threats, such as armed conflict, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and the destruction of our environment. Without the readiness to establish rules at the global level, and subsequently to consistently respect them, local communities, nations, States and even continents will remain helpless in the face of such threats.

Let us focus briefly on one of those threats — the destruction of our environment, which has been at the centre of attention in recent days here in New York. I have no doubt that we are in an environmental crisis. Microplastics are spreading in our oceans. Up to 200 species become extinct every day. I myself have witnessed the collapse of ice walls in Greenland and the melting glaciers in the Pamir mountains in Tajikistan. We have just discussed here the crisis in Amazonia, as we have done for the past few decades, unfortunately with limited results. We are fast approaching a point beyond which we will be able only to mitigate climate change rather than reverse it.

The European Union will continue doing everything possible to confront that threat. Europe is showing leadership in implementing the Paris Agreement, and we hope to win the race to become the world's first carbon-neutral continent. In 2017 alone, the EU and its member States spent €20 billion helping developing countries tackle and adapt to climate change.

However, the natural environment of man, which requires protection, is not only the oceans, the air and the forests. It is also the truth in public life, freedom, the rule of law and international solidarity. To protect the truth, it is not enough to accuse others of promoting fake news. Frankly speaking, it would be enough to simply stop lying. Today, too many politicians use lies as a permanent method to maintain power.

To protect freedom, it is not enough to talk about it in speeches. One must defend the rights of an individual everywhere and every day. One must defend the freedom of speech and a free press. And one must stop flirting with dictators and authoritarian regimes.

To protect the rule of law, one must really accept that the law should be above power, not at its beck and call. If one wants to follow the principles of international solidarity, one must always help the weaker if they are attacked by the stronger and the ruthless, as in the case of Ukraine, for example. If the powerful of our world do not understand that, they will go down in history not as leaders but as fake leaders, and rightly so.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the European Council for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Mr. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Farmajo: It is a great honour and privilege to address the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. It is indeed my sincere belief that the General

Assembly is vital in galvanizing multilateral efforts and actions for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and the promotion of inclusivity in all its forms in order to advance our global agenda for people-centred development, common progress and prosperity. We, in this Assembly, more than ever before must realize, and work towards ensuring, that no one and no nation is left behind in the pursuit of progress and prosperity in this age of interdependence and interconnectivity.

The Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia warmly welcomes this year's theme of the General Assembly, which reminds us all of the importance of stepping up our efforts through greater international cooperation in order to ensure that we, as nations, individually achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of reducing poverty, improving the quality of education, addressing the adverse effects of climate change and promoting partnerships and inclusivity in all our actions at home. Partnerships in all their forms are essential if we are to overcome the greatest common challenges of our time, including security, poverty, climate change and sustainability. In this globalized world, no nation, no matter how wealthy, strong or prepared, can individually stand alone against the tide of global challenges, which requires common action and coordinated multilateral responses. We must strive to create the conditions for individual fulfilment and common prosperity in line with the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am grateful to be here with our valuable partners, many of whom are represented in this great Assembly today, on account of the constructive role that they are playing in Somalia's successful journey to full recovery from a very difficult past. We are also grateful for the role that the United Nations has played and continues to play in Somalia's development journey on the ground.

We are committed to working with the United Nations to advance our inclusive national development agenda. Indeed, Somalia, which has benefitted from the support of both the United Nations and the bilateral support of its States Members, is a great example of the importance and success of the international multilateral system. Somalia's road to recovery, led by its resilient people and Government has come a very long way, and yet we cannot remain silent about or be blind to the discontent with the rising inequality, poverty and division caused by the unfair globalization that has become dominant in the world today. It goes without

saying that inclusiveness in all of its manifestations must come to the fore if we are to succeed in galvanizing multilateral efforts for global security, poverty eradication, quality education and climate action, alongside the other development priorities.

Somalia is also playing a key role in the Horn of Africa's socioeconomic development, and we are confident that the cooperation between the Horn of Africa countries will enhance economic development, political stability, social and cultural connectivity, and most importantly, security cooperation among the countries of the region. The Horn of Africa region has the potential to offer unrivalled opportunities for economic development and growth for its people if we can further strengthen the political, social and economic ties between our countries and our global partners. Horn of Africa States are not alone in working together towards a better future for their countries and people; we have many friends who are supporting us along the way in the interest of peace and security in the wider world. We thank them.

Somalia promotes economic integration in the region and encourages its business community to invest in countries in East Africa and beyond. Somali communities continue to invest in the Republic of Kenya, which, indeed contributes to that country's growth and economic prosperity. Somalia and Kenya, which are neighbours on the Indian Ocean coast of East Africa, enjoy peaceful and friendly relations. We owe much to Kenya for the steadfast support it has given to Somalia's people over the years. While our overall relations are excellent, our maritime boundary has never been delimited, which has made it a source of disagreement between us. Bilateral negotiations in the past have not led to an agreement.

In order to obtain a peaceful and equitable settlement, in 2014, in accordance with international law, Somalia instituted proceedings before the International Court of Justice, the highest legal authority of the United Nations. We are very pleased that the Court found that it had jurisdiction to resolve the dispute and that the final hearing on the merits of the case is scheduled for the first week of November. As a State Member of the United Nations and a State party to the Statute of the Court, Somalia is committed to seeing the judicial settlement process through to its end. Somalia has pledged to comply with the Court's final judgment and to accept the boundary that is delimited by the Court. As a matter of international law, the Court's judgment

will be binding for Kenya as well. We trust that when that judgment is issued and the boundary is established, a lasting settlement to this long-lasting dispute will finally be achieved. In addition, on 3 September, the African Union Peace and Security Council concluded that the African Union is not empowered to intervene in the case before the Court.

I would like to further report that at the margins of this session of the General Assembly, precisely on the evening of 24 September, President Al Sisi of Egypt, who is also the current Chairperson of the African Union, convened and chaired a meeting between President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and me. The meeting was very fruitful. We agreed to restore our good brotherly relationship and strengthen our diplomatic and political cooperation. We further agreed to leave the maritime dispute between our two countries to resolution by the International Court of Justice. Somalia is committed to maintaining a good relationship with Kenya.

The Somali Government is strongly committed to its ambitions in enabling a peacebuilding and State-building agenda. We are making clear strides towards achieving inclusive politics, strengthening democracy and constructing the very rights-based national institutions that are the pillars of strong societies. I can proudly report that we have held successful regional elections in some federal member states in the run-up to the planning of our national parliamentary and presidential elections in 2021. We are determined to facilitate the success of this process through an inclusive electoral bill that will focus on voter registration and better public awareness of the importance of inclusive politics and national progress.

From all the foregoing, it is clear that Somalia is a historic example of reform, resilience and people-driven progress and recovery. Today our national discussions focus on how to deliver inclusive politics, public services, financial and economic reforms, economic growth, good governance and expanded regional cooperation as well as how, working together with our valuable partners at home and abroad, to finally defeat the threat posed by the different factions of the Al-Shabaab terrorist group. Security has been the focus of our Government and its greatest public expenditure since I took office because everything else, including poverty eradication, quality education and climate action depends on it.

Alongside our international partners, we are tirelessly working to rid Somalia of the last pocket of violent extremists and their terrorist activities. This task is by no means easy because of the violent, cowardly and opportunistic guerrilla tactics that Al-Shabaab terrorists use, including bombing innocent civilians and private businesses. Nevertheless, through our holistic strategy comprising deradicalization, successful military offensives, recovery of territory from Al-Shabaab and strengthening of the Somalia National Army and its security capabilities, we are confident that our joint efforts with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other international partners will bear fruit for Somalia and its people as well as for regional and global stability.

We are building a well-trained armed force and accountable, rights-based security institutions that can take over the responsibility of securing Somalia. In partnership with AMISOM and other key international supporters, our Government is working hard to achieve this objective through its transition plan, in line with the national security architecture. In this regard, I wish to thank the brave men and women of the Somali security forces, all the troop-contributing countries of the African Union within AMISOM, and all our international partners that support the security operations in various important ways. These comprehensive reforms have by no means been easy, but through commitment and absolute determination, we have undertaken the biometric registration of the entire Somalia National Army.

Further, the human resources audit of the wider security sector, including biometric registration of all personnel, will be completed shortly. Biometric registration has enabled the Government to eliminate ghost workers, assess the operational readiness of the security personnel, and cut costs so that the savings can be used in other initiatives to further strengthen the security of the Somali people. I am convinced that Somalia's successful security-sector reforms will provide us with the best possible security apparatus to safeguard the well-being and progress of the Somali people.

Quality education liberates, empowers, instils hope and unleashes the great dreams, ambitions and innovations that will create a better world for all of us. All development is anchored in education, and it is clear that galvanizing our multilateral efforts for any

development anywhere must start with national and international support for education in all its forms.

In Somalia, a key symbol of our national recovery has been the enormous expansion of education services across the public and private sector for all stages of learning. We fully understand the need to encourage, support and build on the existing public-private partnership model of education delivery with strong oversight by the federal Government. Despite our difficult past, the design and delivery of quality education today as well as its governance and delivery framework is the most crucial education objective we have set as a Government. It is critical for our young generation to catch up and possibly even leapfrog over us to be able to compete in a globalized economy and benefit from and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Given the importance of quality education to Somalia's peacebuilding and State-building processes as well as to its overall development, our Government has embarked on an ambitious reform programme that aims to expand access to education for children, adolescents and youth, including those from such marginalized communities as persons with disabilities and girls and women. We are intently focused on improving the quality of learning outcomes for all learners, especially at early-grade levels. We are also committed to increasing enrolment rates, ensuring the market relevance of learning opportunities to sustainably growing the economy, creating much-needed jobs and instilling further confidence in our people and their country's prosperity and prospects.

On a practical note, the Somali Government is in the process of developing an inclusive and relevant national curriculum alongside rehabilitating old public schools, while working diligently to establish technical vocational schools and investing in the next generation of teachers and school leaders. For five years running, Somalia has successfully held the national exam, and most of our students, including those with such disabilities as blindness, participated and were successful. We are proud of them all and will continue to work to improve their learning opportunities and employment prospects through better policies, stronger partnerships, accessible facilities and educational leadership. To strengthen quality education globally, we must all share good practices, transfer successful policies and make the necessary link between

education, opportunities and international peace, security and development.

Somalia is very committed to improving the country's natural environment and to promoting community resilience for the sake of both present and future generations. Somalia has taken major steps in instituting environmental-management authorities to implement changes at the national level. The establishment of the Directorate of Environment and Climate Change within the Office of the Prime Minister, for example, is a step in the right direction, and we are confident that this Directorate will effectively lead the development and implementation of environmental regulations and policies. This is evidence of our commitment to climate action for a better, cleaner and more inclusively prosperous environment.

Indeed, climate change threatens to increase the frequency and severity of environmental shocks, and Somalia, with the longest coastline in continental Africa, is already experiencing the effects of rising sea levels and a rising average temperature, which are exacerbated by the effects of degraded lands and deforestation. The 2017 drought in Somalia had a significant impact on the environment, economy and natural-resources sector, with ecosystem losses and damages estimated at an equivalent of more than \$600 million. The loss in productivity of our natural capital points to difficult times ahead for the livestock-based Somali economy, all the more so because as much as 93 per cent of pasture resources have been decimated or destroyed in some regions of the country. This has directly and indirectly affected the lives and livelihoods of the 6.2 million people, about 60 per cent of the population, who depend on pastoralism.

Owing to this vulnerability, Somalia's economy could take much longer to recover than otherwise might be the case, given that it continues to suffer the repetitive occurrence of climate-related hazards. The drivers of vulnerability and fragility in Somalia are complex and therefore require comprehensive and long-term solutions for integrating sustainable natural-resource management and a global environmental agenda into Somalia's recovery and national development plan. The lessons learned from our experience is that climate action is urgently needed to reverse the catastrophic environmental damage that poses an existential threat to our collective future.

Let me assure the Assembly that my Government is fully committed to the outcomes of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and, equally, to other multilateral environmental agreements that are dedicated to protecting our planet and safeguarding the future for all. In this regard, we strongly urge the full implementation and enforcement of Security Council resolution 751 (1992), which requires all Member States to take the necessary measures to prevent the direct and indirect import and export of charcoal from Somalia. Implementation of the charcoal ban will not only save the environment but will also deny international terrorists a source of financing on which they depend to hurt the innocent and most vulnerable in our society.

Poverty is one of the greatest sufferings a people and nation can experience. The people and the Government of Somalia are working hard to build a more sustainable future free from poverty and with strong social protections. Today, we are on the verge of completing an inclusive ninth national development plan, which will guide the national strategic policies and frameworks for eradicating poverty in Somalia. The process of conducting the national development plan was inclusive and participatory and promoted accountability, transparency and shared responsibility for future implementation. Our approach to eradicating poverty is to create economic opportunities for our people, and, to that end, we are engaged in an ambitious and successful fiscal and economic reform programme guided by the staff-monitored programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with a view to achieving debt cancellation by early next year through the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

According to the IMF, our performance to date has been strong, and we have achieved much in a short space of time. We continue to raise domestic revenue, improve national budgeting processes and make our financial system more secure and transparent, while instilling fiscal discipline in our national operations. We are working closely, both bilaterally and multilaterally, with all our key partners and stakeholders, including the Somali people and international financial institutions, to secure debt cancellation for Somalia. Achieving this end will allow Somalia to gain access to the valuable and much-needed concessionary resources that would complement our national domestic-revenue mobilization so as to cover the cost of eradicating poverty, improving public services, including quality education and

security, and taking effective actions to safeguard our future against the scourge of climate change.

Alongside economic and fiscal reforms, our Government has championed a zero-tolerance approach to corruption so that every dollar is spent on the public good. If we are to eradicate poverty, we cannot afford to lose a single cent to corruption. Accordingly, we must always ensure value for money in public expenditure and tackle corruption head on. This is why I signed the historic anti-corruption bill last week. My Government is determined to deliver on the content of this legislation for the benefit of the people of Somalia.

Let me conclude by reiterating Somalia's strong support for galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education and climate action in all its forms. In the current globalized age of uncertainty and common threats and opportunities, we must all join together to achieve common progress and inclusive prosperity. Our global journey towards sustainable development may be long, but every step that we take together will be rewarded with stronger societies, a more equitable and connected world and a community of nations strengthened and empowered through such collaboration.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the President of the Federal Republic of Somalia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Nayib Armando Bukele, President of the Republic of El Salvador

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. Nayib Armando Bukele, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Nayib Armando Bukele, President of the Republic of El Salvador, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Bukele (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people of El Salvador, who have given me the honour and responsibility to stand before the Assembly from this rostrum in my capacity as President, I am pleased to address this audience for the first time.

Just a moment, if I may, I am going to take a picture. To be here before the Assembly during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly is a privilege and an honour that I wanted to share with the world, because the world, the new world, is no longer in this General Assembly but rather where that photo will go — the world's largest network, where billions of people are connected almost all the time and in every facet of life.

Believe me, many more people will see that selfie than will hear this statement. I hope it came out good. Even if we do not want to accept it, that network is increasingly becoming the real world and the format the Assembly uses is increasingly becoming obsolete. We have heard many good ideas and interesting speeches, but really, the way we have been speaking here has not changed in 74 years. The world has changed, yet the General Assembly remains the same.

Perhaps in a few years, tens of thousands of people will not have to travel to New York to gather in this building, when a series of videoconferences would have cost several hundred million dollars less, and I am certain that they would have practically the same effect and impact.

In addition, the people who come here would not have to leave their families, friends, lives and daily responsibilities to come to a series of meetings to which fewer and fewer people pay attention. I imagine that some will think that what I am saying does not make sense; but they should ask their children or grandchildren when they leave this meeting — they will likely use an app on their smartphones do to that — what gets their attention. It is not that the United Nations or its General Assembly is obsolete — although if we do not embrace change we may very well become obsolete — but rather that we still have a major opportunity to take advantage of that great network that is being built before our very eyes, not only to save our relevance but also to multiply it exponentially.

On the other hand, all of us — the United Nations system, Governments, politicians, etcetera — could ignore those changes and wait for what happened to Kodak, Blockbuster, the dinosaurs and the Teen

Choice Awards, or what will happen to many of the big retail stores, hotels, travel agencies, cable companies and political parties and is also happening to many media outlets, to happen to us. A big TV crew to shoot interviews is no longer needed, let alone sophisticated equipment. Look at the iPhone 11 or the new Samsung S10 — even movies can be filmed with them. Why do we continue to do things the way we have always done them?

For that very reason, I have the opportunity to be here with those present, because we, the people of El Salvador, are tired of following the obsolete way of doing things; it does not work. We have decided to do things differently and I believe that the United Nations should think of doing the same. What should we do as an international community? We should not rescue the format of the Assembly, because it is too late; it has become obsolete. We must accept that the world has change and that it is always changing, although here we continue on with the General Assembly just as we did 74 years ago, without really accepting the inevitable.

The digital revolution is becoming a human revolution in which, just as each country at the United Nations has a vote whether large or small, each citizen of the world has a voice that is magnified thanks to social networks. Consequently, there are no longer 195 voices representing 7 billion human beings, but rather billions of human beings representing themselves.

The United Nations still has a strong ability to bring people together, but it does so in traditional terms that weaken that capacity and each year it gets weaker. All the statements delivered by the Heads of State in the Assembly throughout this week will have less impact than a video of a famous YouTuber. I bet that one of those videos on YouTube has more views than all our speeches put together.

That new reality does not mean that we are not relevant; in fact, there are still unique resources here — economic and important resources for solving the world's biggest problems. It is the format that is obsolete. As we have seen and experienced in many countries, a couple of images on Instagram or a few YouTube videos can have a much more powerful impact than any speech in the Assembly, even from the most powerful countries in the world. An image uploaded by a citizen can spark a revolution — and in fact that has already happened.

It is time for us to become more inclusive and to accept and recognize that we can be in every country, every hour of the day, every day. It is time to start a quest for a format that invites the collective mass of all the countries of the world to participate, without having to be present here physically in New York. Why do we not change that format to make it more inclusive of the world's citizens? Why do we not post a 15-minute video of each of us to an online General Assembly platform so that all the representatives of the countries can see it on demand, when it is convenient for them and the important things that they are doing, which require attention in their countries, are not interrupted?

How many of those present watch live TV? How many read the paper copy of a newspaper? They should ask their children, or grandchildren if they have them, that same question, or even my 20-year-old daughter. We can imagine the answer. Spending one week at the United Nations when we could be solving issues in our countries will therefore become a waste of time. Our cell phones are the future of the General Assembly. Why then do we not give the young people of the world the opportunity to propose new ideas, those young people who are ambitious to change the world by breaking out of the paradigms that imprisoned the previous century? In fact, they are already doing it; we are just not listening to them. We are not making the most of the amount of resources we have to do this.

Are those of us here today, supposedly representing those new generations, really doing so? Do we really represent the young people of today, the populations of our countries? We must give the floor to our millions of citizens — whether millennials, centennials or people of any age — so that they can offer solutions to the issues of poverty, hunger, climate change and disease, and so on. Why not organize a contest of ideas in order to further galvanize and motivate the young people of the world? We suggest awarding a prize to those whose proposals give us the key to solving the great problems the planet faces, such as energy supply, drought, poverty, hunger, climate change and the many other problems we face.

We have so many resources available to us that it would be a mere drop in the ocean if our Organization were to grant a prize of \$10 million to each young person who managed to solve those problems with their ideas. Imagine how much we would save and how much we would achieve if we only opened our minds. We would open a Pandora's box of the collective creativity of

billions of human beings and billions of brains thinking at the speed of light, connected at the speed of light and finding solutions to the problems that we have not been able to solve in that archaic format.

It is 2019 and, for obvious reasons, we have more technology at our disposal than ever before in the history of humankind. Do we truly believe that, by doing the same as we have always done, we will be able solve the problems that we have only made worse? Perhaps some, or indeed many, of those problems that we have been unable to solve could be solved by a millennial who thinks outside the box.

In a few years — perhaps no more than 10 — everything I am speaking about now will be happening in reality, but why not start now? Why not begin creating a platform where that new way of thinking for the General Assembly of the United Nations is precisely the mechanism for change and evolution? We must accept the inevitable irrelevance of the Assembly's current format; we must accept what does not work and start to do things differently now. What I am trying to explain is that the process of that new way of thinking has already begun. All the young people who are listening to me are doing so from their smartphones and those who are taking what I say seriously will already be thinking about how to make the changes that our planet needs.

That new way of doing things, in the sphere of public policy, has already been successful in many places. In my own country, El Salvador, where the number of smartphones exceeds our population, the effective and efficient use of those new platforms brought down a bipartisan system that has held hegemonic power since the Chapultepec Agreement. I was able to reach millions of citizens via Facebook Live, while my opponents held rallies with just several hundred of their own co-religionists. The change of format, not just of message and content, led to Salvadorans electing me as their President.

That is the way we are governing as well. I have a landline in my office that I have never used. When I need information, I request it directly from my ministers, without needing to involve intermediaries or convene meetings that cause delays. Communication today is direct and much more democratic — there are no filters. We all have a voice that can and must be heard.

A few days ago, I proved that to myself again. On 15 September each year, El Salvador celebrates its independence. While the attention of the media and most of our Government was focused on a huge parade through the streets of the capital, the children of a small village named El Aguacate marched in their own parade along a narrow, rural dirt road. A teacher had dressed them up as if they were a first-rate band of peaceful protestors — almost everything was handmade, with powdered milk cans as drums and spoons to play them with.

Someone from the community filmed the parade on their cell phone and uploaded it to their Facebook page, probably so that their friends and family could see it. I am sure they never imagined that the patriotism and sheer joy of those children, despite their lack of resources, would make that video go viral in my country. In a matter of hours, the media had picked up the video, which was shared by thousands of Salvadorans and eventually reached me. After watching it, I instructed my ministers to improve conditions in the village of El Aguacate immediately. Right away, via WhatsApp, they agreed to visit the school there.

Three days later, our ministers arrived to deliver real musical instruments for the children. Now, the streets are being paved, LED lamps are being installed and the school is being refurbished. The community will be transformed in a way that nobody could have imagined a month ago. It all started with a video that went viral. Without even realizing that it happened, every person who has a cell phone or is connected to the internet is now a spokesperson and a source of information. They can even have political influence.

The video of the children going viral animated thousands of voices that not only encouraged them but also asked the Government to take genuine and decisive action. The teacher from El Aguacate and the person who uploaded the video enabled something very ordinary and very local to be seen throughout the entire country, which brought about real change for those pupils. The environment those children inhabit is no longer just their community — like all of us, they are now also citizens of the world. We are talking about one teacher in a tiny school in a small village in a rural area in a small municipality in El Salvador.

Let us imagine the transformative and convening power that the General Assembly of the United Nations could have by using the same network that those

children used. Why not harness that convening power? Why not use that platform to summon the citizens of the world to participate in the General Assembly? I do not want to be misunderstood here. The United Nations plays a crucial role in maintaining world peace, fighting against hunger, improving health, leading the search for development, promoting the rights of women and children, protecting our environment, addressing the plight of refugees and even tackling nuclear non-proliferation.

Yet we must also acknowledge the fact that we are already reaching a point where the problems we face are overwhelming us. The communication revolution is a fact, a democratic revolution and the start of a new human era. Societies have made progress organically, but the United Nations has not. We must change and adapt and accept that progress. Today, the citizens of the world are more empowered than ever before. Let us give them the voice that they deserve here at the General Assembly, instead of letting only the privileged few who are gathered here be the owners of absolute truth.

Some will understand this message very well, others not yet. Unfortunately, some refuse to accept the new democratic form of communication, which is the freedom of expression on steroids — billions of people interconnecting, every one of them with an opinion, a solution, an idea and a voice.

Successful politicians used to say that all politics was local and they were right. Those politicians understood what won elections back then. Yet all politics today is personal. Few people understand that, but it is the reality. If those who understand that have been successful and if that is the right way to engage the citizens of the world in solving the most important problems we face, is that not what the United Nations should be doing as well?

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of El Salvador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Nayib Armando Bukele, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Ashwin Adhin, Vice-President of the Republic of Suriname

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by Mr. Ashwin Adhin, Vice-President of the Republic of Suriname.

Mr. Ashwin Adhin, Vice-President of the Republic of Suriname, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Ashwin Adhin, Vice-President of the Republic of Suriname, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Adhin (Suriname): On behalf of His Excellency Mr. Desiré Delano Bouterse, President of the Republic of Suriname, I extend sincere congratulations to Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. I also wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for her skilful leadership of the previous session and I wish her well in her future endeavours.

Diversity characterizes Suriname and that diversity is manifested by our environment. Suriname is recognized as having the highest percentage of forest cover of any country on the planet and we are committed to preserving 93 per cent of our forest cover. Suriname is also recognized as the joint most carbon-negative country, alongside Bhutan. Suriname has unique biodiversity. In 1998, we were the first country to reserve 11 per cent of our land mass for scientific and conservation purposes, as a gift to humankind. That represents 1.6 million hectares of our territory — an ambitious contribution at that time.

It is therefore easy to understand why Suriname — along with many others here present in the Assembly Hall today — is deeply concerned about the effects of our changing global climate. Appropriately, we show solidarity with the Government and people of the Bahamas and others affected by the recent hurricanes. Parts of a small Caribbean nation have once again been wiped out. Is it a coincidence that in less than 3 years, several Caribbean countries have been struck by hurricanes of the highest category, or is it a telling phenomenon revealing that climate change has already become a fact of life with devastating effects?

I wholeheartedly agree with the Secretary-General when he says, with regard to climate change, that now is the time for action and not for empty speeches and promises. It was in that spirit that Suriname initiated and hosted the first high-level meeting for high-forest low-deforestation (HFLD) countries in February. Since 2007, HFLD developing countries have received less than \$2 billion in climate finance — less than 14 per cent of all climate funds committed.

At that meeting, the Krutu of Paramaribo Joint Declaration on HFLD Climate Finance Mobilization was adopted, representing the collective interests of 27 participating developing countries, which committed to taking action and increasing their access to climate finance in order to maintain their forests intact. Suriname has now been mandated by that group to lead the HFLD developing countries in achieving the joint objectives expressed in the Paramaribo Declaration. We therefore call for strong ambition and more action aimed at global mitigation and adaptation efforts, especially in order to facilitate access to finance.

The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/74/1) paints a worrying picture of the current state of world affairs with regard to peace and security.

Stating that diversity characterizes Suriname also reflects the fact that Suriname's population harbours at least seven major world cultures. The message of our national anthem is strong and clear, "*Wans' ope tata komopo, wi mu' seti kondre bun*", which means, "Wherever we may have come from, we must build a prosperous nation". That has inspired us, as a diverse people, to advance towards a prosperous nation and has prevented inter-ethnic clashes, as Suriname is renowned for its harmony and tolerance, its respect for all religions and cultures and the peaceful coexistence of its citizens, while at the regional level, Suriname has always advocated and contributed to maintaining the Caribbean and South American region as a zone of peace.

At the regional level, we are confronted with tensions that have given rise to mistrust among States that for decades had enjoyed excellent political, economic, social and diplomatic relations. In the Latin American and Caribbean region, countries have endeavoured for long periods of time to preserve and promote peace, security, political stability and social and political inclusion.

Suriname therefore reiterates the critical importance of respect for the principles of non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of States and underscores the relevance of dialogue, diplomacy and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as well as political and economic cooperation, as the building blocks for durable stability, peace and democracy. In that regard, I should like to mention several key points.

First, we applaud the recent steps taken by parties at the national level in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to reach common ground through meaningful dialogue.

Secondly, our colonial past has presented Suriname with unresolved border issues in the western and eastern parts of our territory. It is our conviction that we will find a solution to secure our territorial integrity in the near future. Suriname is intentionally choosing the path of dialogue in order to resolve those remnants from our colonial past.

Thirdly, with regard to the land rights of our indigenous and tribal communities, we have developed a road map aimed at achieving the legal recognition of those land rights within a Surinamese context. In response to the recent forest fires in the Amazon region, Suriname adhered to and welcomed the pact to protect the Amazon, which was signed in Leticia, Colombia, as a call to preserve and sustainably develop the region.

We strongly emphasized the inclusiveness of all Amazonian countries as part of a living Amazon that compels us and those countries to rise above political differences, organize relevant provisions to secure the development of indigenous and tribal communities and uphold the sovereignty of countries and the Amazon as a region. In so doing, we will continue to utilize the provisions of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization.

Ms. Beckles (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We consider the ongoing trade disputes among major international players to be a serious challenge with far-reaching consequences for our local economies. In the same vein, we strongly oppose the blacklisting and arbitrary seizure of funds without due regard for the severe consequences for the economic stability of countries. Those unwelcome actions remain major obstacles beyond the control of many nations.

An atmosphere of trust and political will is crucial and should lead to dialogue and cooperation.

By the same token, we strongly disapprove of the continuation of the more than half-a-century-old economic, financial and commercial embargo against the sister Republic of Cuba and its people. Repeatedly, the vast majority of nations has taken a stance against that embargo. One may wonder if it is now not finally the time to understand that the continuation of those measures has been and will remain counterproductive.

Lastly, with our extensive open borders and sparsely inhabited hinterland, Suriname is a victim of the illicit trans-border drug trade. The recent adoption of the National Drug Master Plan (2019-2023) is a testimony to our resolve to combat that illicit trade, an important component of which is international cooperation. Bearing that in mind, Suriname co-chaired the biregional partnership between the European Union and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States on the Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs, resulting in the adoption of a document that contains the necessary guidelines on the fight against illicit drug trafficking and drug-related transnational crime.

Concerning our young people, we all are witnessing today how they are voicing their concerns about their future — and they have the right to do so. With lead responsibility for youth in the Caribbean Community, Suriname strongly advocates for youth involvement as a prerequisite for sustainable development and has made a deliberate choice to meet that expectation. We pride ourselves on our intergenerational approach, which provides opportunities for youth to engage and participate in all levels of decision-making. Young people are an integral part of the Surinamese delegation here today as well.

Threats and obstacles to the achievement of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have been the key topic of concern. Every Member State has its own challenges. In that regard, Suriname notes the economic stagnation as a consequence of the fast and sharp decline in world market prices of crude oil and gold from 2013 to 2015, which significantly diminished the foreign currency earnings of the Surinamese economy and in response to which the Government executed a home-grown reform programme — home-grown because this Government is cognizant of the fact that our main asset for development is our people.

In 2010, President Bouterse envisioned and commenced a social contract with the people of Suriname. Universal health care, a general pension, a minimum hourly wage, access to affordable housing and education are the main components of that social contract, which the Government continued to uphold despite the economic crisis. Today, The economy has recovered in record time, achieving steady positive growth for two years in a row — 2017 and 2018 — while inflation has come down from double digits to a single digit and is continuing to decrease; since mid-2018, it has dipped below 5 per cent annually. Exports and imports are both much stronger than during the crisis years.

Secondly, I must mention an obstacle that is still unresolved and that if not addressed will make the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) practically unattainable — our classification as a middle-income country. As for many other developing countries, including the countries of the Caribbean, that classification of Suriname is based on gross domestic product per capita only and does not reflect our vulnerabilities.

We strongly reject that unrealistic classification, which disregards the full set of challenges that we face and which should be addressed with urgency. Access to concessional financing for our development is critical to allow for accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Thirdly, our newest endeavour and priority in realizing the SDGs is the strengthening of our national planning institute. That institute has been extending its reach to all bodies of Government and applying results-based management to our annual plan and annual budget and will be instrumental in realizing a long-term strategy for development. Strengthening that core planning institute will greatly help us in addressing the challenge of collecting, analysing and delivering reliable data and statistics, which will in turn surely enhance the responsiveness of our decision-making, including the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and therefore has become one of our top priorities.

In closing, given a world in which there is an urgent need to cooperate and the imperative to solve the many serious issues it faces, Suriname is convinced that the United Nations remains the most important Organization for addressing all matters that confront the international community, one that is focused on

finding solutions and taking into consideration the interests of all Member States.

It is therefore essential that the United Nations become a more effective multilateral institution, with adequate resources, that is fit for purpose to confront the challenges ahead. Suriname recognizes the eminent role that the United Nations can fulfil in ensuring lasting development and peace. It is up to us as Member States to make it work — and we can make it work.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Suriname for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ashwin Adhin, Vice-President of the Republic of Suriname, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium.

Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Michel (*spoke in French*): Building a rules-based world, promoting dignity and universal values, surmounting the climate challenge and launching humankind on the path to sustainable development — those are the commitments that should bring us together.

Each country and nation has its own history and benchmarks, but every human being carries within themselves a spark of freedom, a thirst for emancipation and those universal values that nothing and no one should be able to undermine. That is the meaning of the Charter of the United Nations that unites us.

In a changing world, to use the words of Jacques Chirac, there is no greater risk than standing still. Multilateralism is about movement and continuous dialogue, first to better understand each other and even more to respect each other and build a foundation of trust. Of course, there will be many differences of opinion, people will often refuse to compromise and misunderstandings are possible. History always shows,

however, that progress comes from cooperation. To be patriotic is to love one's own and wish the best not only for them but also for others — that is the very essence of our Organization. It is not a matter of opposing, dividing or regressing; on the contrary, it is a question of connecting, bringing together, strengthening and better committing oneself with the strongest of bonds — universal values and the rule of law.

Three global challenges are today testing humankind: climate change, sustainable development, and peace and security. We know that those three challenges are intrinsically linked. Tireless determination, innovation and intelligence are more necessary than ever. We need multilateralism that is bold, brave and enterprising.

Back in the nineteenth century, Victor Hugo already understood that “Nature speaks and humankind does not listen”. Our Secretary-General just a few days ago, in words as apt as urgent, perfectly expressed the urgent need to take action on the climate challenge. In my view, there is no room to be paralysed by fear or anger, which are always bad advisers. It is on the contrary a question of translating the appeals to our conscience into positive and irreversible forces, seeking the remedy with a clear mind and taking bold action.

The impact of climate change becomes more evident and destructive by the day. The most recent estimates show that change is accelerating and that the efforts made to date are not enough. In that regard, the vast majority of European States have committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050. I also welcome the Chilean initiative to achieve climate neutrality in keeping with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Safeguarding our biodiversity, forests and oceans must also be at the heart of our joint actions. Climate change is having a structural impact on food security, migration and even stability in many countries. But it is our responsibility not to fall into the fearful trap of catastrophism — the transition to carbon neutrality can and must offer positive opportunities for the development and improving our way of life.

Innovation, technology, initiative and freedom of enterprise are more crucial than ever and governments, businesses, start-ups, non-governmental organizations and citizens all share responsibility. My message is an optimistic one — we can and will succeed.

My country, Belgium, together with its European partners, is determined to do its part in our global effort, all the more since the reduction of the climate threat must be achieved by strengthening our capacity to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which constitute the keystone of personal dignity and our collective security.

In discharging her duties as SDG Advocate with all of her heart, Queen Mathilde is demonstrating the sincere commitment of my country in the service of those noble objectives. Undeniable progress has been made on several fronts. Extreme poverty has reached its lowest level since records began. Infant mortality and infectious diseases are decreasing and access to drinking water, schooling and education are on the rise. The gains are real, but we know we still have an extremely long way to go. Every 11 seconds, a pregnant woman or newborn child dies somewhere in the world. Hundreds of millions of people do not currently have regular access to drinking water. Too many children do not have access to school and suffer every day from malnutrition.

We must continue to innovate and work towards progress. The private sector can play a major role in reducing poverty. We must promote free trade with reciprocal rules and ambitious social and environmental standards. Investments in basic infrastructure and technological innovation must also be expanded. New technologies, artificial intelligence and the data economy must, however, be better regulated and aligned with personal freedoms, respect for our private lives, and the protection of democratic values against any arbitrary intrusion into our freedom of conscience and expression.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General rightly shows that gender equality is central for overcoming development challenges. I am proud that the Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium, Alexander de Croo, makes a powerful appeal in that regard in his book *The Age of Women*. I share the belief that feminism is a matter for men as well.

We must change mindsets — a prosperous society depends on the talents of all its people. For that reason, all forms of discrimination must be fought — racism, antisemitism, homophobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, hate speech are always devastatingly toxic, insidious, brutal and undignified forms of violence. In the words of Nelson Mandela, “to be free is not merely to cast

off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others”.

Without progress, peace is not possible; without peace, progress is not possible. For the sixth time in its history, my country, Belgium, is a non-permanent member of the Security Council. We contribute to the prevention and resolution of crises on a daily basis. We endeavour to make the protection of civilians, especially women and children, the top priority. Every peacekeeping operation, with its particular challenges, is necessary. Mandates must be more specific and better targeted. Effectiveness must be a constant requirement.

We also wish to pay attention to areas of tension and the seeds of conflict — situations not yet in the spotlight but which could quickly take centre stage should they deteriorate. We must detect the warning signs, tackle the root causes, invest in political dialogue, strengthen mediation, promote democratic values, encourage links among different groups, fight hate speech and stop impunity.

The world is changing. We want a better world that is more predictable. The multiplication of tensions and crises, if not defused swiftly enough, can spiral out of control, seriously threatening peace and security. In the Gulf region, an atmosphere of escalation is growing stronger, threatening not only regional but also global stability. Oil facilities in the Strait of Hormuz are strategically important for the global economy. We call on all actors concerned to refrain from any unilateral measures likely to inflame tensions. We must avoid any incident liable to trigger ever worse consequences. We call for restraint and dialogue to open the way towards a more stable and secure future in the Gulf region.

A divergence of views on the nuclear deal with Iran generated the current tensions. We continue to support the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. We call for discussions to resume on all subjects of concern — the nuclear question, Iran’s role in the region and its ballistic missile programme. We therefore express our full support to the mediation efforts under way at the initiative of France.

The situation in Syria also remains cause for concern. We are worried by the escalation of violence in and around Idlib. In the Security Council we have taken, together with Germany and Kuwait, a position against the escalating violence, proposing a humanitarian draft resolution last week aiming to achieve a ceasefire and protect the millions of civilians

living that area. We regret that, despite broad support, the draft resolution was subject to a double veto. The bombing of civilian populations, schools and hospitals in no way advances the fight against terrorism; rather, it likely helps fuel terrorism.

We will not abandon the Syrian people. There is no military solution to that conflict. Only a political process under the auspices United Nations will make it possible to bring it to an end. The establishment of the Constitutional Committee is a step in the right direction.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been on the agenda of the General Assembly for decades, yet today peace seems a more remote possibility than ever. The situation on the ground is deteriorating, violence and mistrust are reinforcing each other and settlements are actively continuing. Nonetheless, we must promote the emergence of a just and lasting peace in the interests of both the Palestinians and Israelis and of the region as a whole.

The parameters for a just and lasting peace are well recognized. International law is the cornerstone of the multilateral order and any initiative seeking to circumvent it only fuels further injustice and conflict. The aim must remain to create an independent sovereign, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its neighbours. Israel must enjoy peace and security within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Belgium's leading international cooperation partner, we continue to work side by side with the population. The first steps towards the expansion of political space, such as the release of political prisoners, are heartening, although immense challenges remain to better meet the legitimate expectations and aspirations of the population. We will support all positive forces seeking to contribute to forging a better future for that great country at the heart of Central Africa.

Turning to the Sahel, the security situation is deteriorating despite the actions of the States of the region and the efforts of the international community. Insecurity is spreading and inter-ethnic conflict, fanned by the proliferation of militias, is being capitalized upon by terrorist groups, which are steadily extending their murderous reach beyond the Group of Five for the Sahel countries to threaten neighbouring countries as well. Flows of displaced persons are intensifying, cultures are in danger and the humanitarian situation

is overwhelming the region's populations. We need to mobilize side by side with the States of the Sahel and we must uphold our commitments to them.

We are not rid of terrorism. The fall of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria does not signal the end of its deadly criminal ideology. Da'esh continues its indoctrination and threatens innocent and vulnerable targets as well as law enforcement, seeking to spark radicalization with an absolute cynicism and relentlessly stirring up hatred and anxiety.

My country, like many others, has been directly afflicted by the cowardice of terrorism. We must be tireless and fearless in our fight against violent extremism. Prevention and suppression must be more effective. International cooperation will be crucial here, too, to eradicate the scourge that inflicts such sorrow on our world.

The shared dream we must all work to realize is that of a world that is more stable, more predictable and more just. To our children and their children in turn, we wish to leave a planet that is healthier, better living standards, rights and freedoms. No border can interrupt that universal dream.

Eradicating the climate threat, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and working tirelessly for peace and security will require broad and unwavering determination. Preventing conflicts at an early stage and defusing them, dealing peacefully with disputes, weaving the fabric of dialogue and nurturing the bonds of trust, that is what we believe is necessary to live up to the Charter of the United Nations, which obliges us to enact those binding universal values and, above all, to live up to the humanity that resides in the heart and soul of everyone one of us.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister, Minister of State, Minister of Communications and Media and Minister for Religious Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister of State, Minister of Communications and Media and

Minister for Religious Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Mr. Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister, Minister of State, Minister of Communications and Media and Minister for Religious Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister, Minister of State, Minister of Communications and Media and Minister for Religious Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Bettel (Luxembourg) (spoke in French): I would like to begin on a personal note by thanking the previous speaker, Charles Michel, who will be stepping down from the Belgian Government in a few months to take over the reins of the presidency of the European Council. I take this opportunity to wish him the best of luck as his neighbour in that endeavour that will occupy him for some years to come.

At the outset, I think we are all aware that the week under way here is remarkable in several respects — not only in the number of Member States participating, which continues to grow, but also the number of topics addressed during this week, whether in plenary, major meetings or in side events in parallel to the series of summits or high-level events.

This week is further notable for the unprecedented momentum to tackle specific challenges. I am referring, first and foremost, to the climate emergency, as reflected by the great many demonstrations in cities and towns in countries around the world. The activism of young people, together with the proliferation of initiatives by civil society, the private sector and intentional entities, is truly remarkable. We have all seen that over the past few days.

However, it is through the actions of the men and women in Government that the momentum must find its expression in order to prevent an environmental, economic and ultimately geopolitical catastrophe. International security, growth, migration and human rights — not one of those areas is today unaffected by climate change, which becomes ever more alarming each year. The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change details the scale of the challenge and the urgent need for action. Only by cutting present global greenhouse gas emissions in half

by 2030 followed by climate neutrality by 2050 will allow us to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

I was able to take the opportunity, for which I am grateful, on Monday during the Climate Summit to give an account of my country's contributions to collective efforts: first, we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 to 55 per cent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels; secondly, we will increase the share of renewable energy in the mix we consume by 23 to 25 per cent by 2030; we will increase energy efficiency by 40 to 44 per cent by 2030; and thirdly, we will soon adopt a framework climate law aiming to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.

Those figures notwithstanding, most young people are frustrated because they believe such numbers are empty promises and will remain nothing more than numbers we proclaim. It is up to us to reassure our children that their future is secure. The hope and optimism of emerging generations also feed on their trust in their parents' actions. However, in the fight against climate change over the decades to come, young people are our allies, because they are never, on principle, opposed to change. Never. Youth brings change. It embodies change. For young people, change is a virtue; it is fundamentally positive. It is the way life is.

We understand that life is also about movement. When one is young and more so when one is no longer young, it is easy to note the importance of mobility. In Luxembourg, we decided to show that the fight against climate change can bring positive change and an improvement in the quality of life for all. We undertook an unprecedented landmark measure — free public transport at the national level for all buses, trams and trains, starting next year. Of course, we need an attractive, reliable and comfortable public transportation system. These are all challenges that we must overcome, and we are working on them.

With regard to international solidarity, for 2021-2025, Luxembourg will allocate €200 million for financial and technical assistance to combat climate change in developing countries, with priority given to the least developed countries and small island developing States. On an annual basis, that is twice the sum allocated in 2014-2020. A significant portion of those funds will go to the Green Climate Fund.

Luxembourg will continue its efforts to create a favourable environment for green finance. In

2016, the Luxembourg Stock Exchange launched the Luxembourg Green Exchange, the first global listing platform dedicated exclusively to green bonds. In partnership with the European Investment Bank, also based in Luxembourg — which I sincerely thank for its collaboration — we created the Climate Finance Platform to increase our ability to leverage private investments in climate projects while mitigating their financial risk. We hope that, in the long-term, that this project will extend to the financing of the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

At the Summit held here yesterday and the day before, we discussed how critical financing is to meet those important Goals. That said, the contribution of States remains essential, especially in the area of financing for development. Another summit is being held on this subject in a room a few steps from here, where my country will present innovative initiatives, particularly in the field of investment vehicles with a social and environmental impact. The mobilization of private resources is a reality in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

However, the most innovative mechanisms cannot compensate for the relative decline in public funding. For its part, Luxembourg will continue to devote 1 per cent of its gross national income to official development assistance, with a focus on the least developed countries. The funds allocated to international climate financing and to hosting refugees are additional to that, in accordance with the principle of additionality.

For years, we have remained convinced — and I know that the politics of cooperation just before elections, for some, is not very popular — that no matter what Administration is in power in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, investing in cooperation is the best preventive measure and the best investment that can be made. And we will continue to do so.

The five summit meetings being held this week on the margins of the general debate illustrate that the major challenges facing humankind can be addressed only within a universal and comprehensive framework. Nevertheless, there is a sense that multilateralism has, in other periods, been more successful than it is today. We see that, for example, in the fields of human rights, migration, security and trade. With regard to trade, for instance, the use of unilateral measures and countermeasures — often based on real concerns,

but also often based on false pretexts — helps no one and drags us into a cycle that is dangerous to the entire international community. It is our people who, ultimately, end up losing out.

It is our duty, for the sake of our future, to relaunch multilateral formats. For our part, we have always been in favour of active, dynamic and rule-of-law multilateralism. This is natural for a small country with an open economy, but it is also an informed choice beyond the considerations of sovereignty alone. To the extent that we are able, we try to participate actively in the most committed forums in the pursuit of greater international cooperation. In that connection, to name but two examples, I note our participation in the High Ambition Coalition to fight climate change and our contribution to the Alliance for Multilateralism.

The European Union is one such push for multilateralism, which has enabled our continent to live in peace since 1957. Despite the limited conflict we have seen on the European continent, the members of the European Union have lived in peace since then. In that connection, the rise of populists in Europe is not helping. Conflicts, frozen or not, disputes between States and internal tensions among ethnic or religious groups persist in Europe. We cannot claim that Ukraine is now living in peace. The Caucuses and the Balkans are also rather tense. In other words, Europe is not in a position to lecture others on their actions. Nevertheless, it is important to be able to share and seek solutions together.

Turning to the Middle East, the peace process is not improving, but rather is deteriorating year upon year. The prospects for a just and balanced peace are diminishing, along with the concept of a two-State solution. Recent developments in the context of the election campaign in Israel bear that out. At the same time, recent initiatives of an essentially bilateral nature, if they ever come to fruition, cannot replace the multilateral actors that confer international legitimacy on any negotiated solution.

The Middle East remains a source of serious concern. The wars in Syria and Yemen continue. We cannot never forget the suffering of civilians, the denial of humanitarian assistance and the flagrant, repeated and systematic violations of human rights in the region, which are our primary concern. But there are also other recent events, such as the attacks on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. Let us therefore learn from our mistakes.

All actors in the region must help calm the situation and avoid escalation. That, of course, also applies to Iran, as well as to all other actors in the region. Tehran must also comply anew with all the provisions of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. My country, like the whole of the European Union, wants to believe that it is possible — even if it means broadening the scope — to make the 2015 agreement work. But if that is to happen, the United States and Iran must resume their dialogue.

The very volatile situation in the Middle East reminds us that contemporary crises are complex and have enormous explosive potential. Today, the mobile and instantaneous nature of communications have brought us closer to the misfortunes of all in a much more direct way. We must never forget that, beyond trade relations, direct investments and alliances, it is the destinies of individuals — men, women and children — that connect us all.

That is particularly true with regard to the situation in Libya, which is not improving. We see the ongoing difficulties that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ghassan Salamé, continues to experience in bringing the parties to the table. It is crucial to reflect on how to resolve that situation. We know, too, that today it is impossible to tackle the situation in Libya without addressing the plight of the thousands of migrants from Africa, who must traverse the war-torn country in the hope of reaching Europe.

I believe it is important to note that the ties between the African continent and mine are not limited to migration issues. Too often, there is a tendency to limit them to that issue. They never have been and never will be. Our ties are ancestral, forged by geographical and cultural proximity and by a common history, which has been painful at times and marked by the slave trade and colonialism, among other things. Today, my country's ties with the countries and peoples of the African continent are ties of friendship, solidarity and mutual respect. Luxembourg maintains particularly close links with the francophone West African countries.

I would now like to say a few words about human rights worldwide. The situation on the ground is not good, and I am not referring only to conflict situations. It is also deteriorating with respect to gains that we thought had been consolidated and that are now systematically being called into question.

In conflict situations, the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is a scourge that continues to strike throughout the world. We have seen this in equatorial Africa, in the Great Lakes region, in Iraq with Da'esh and in the Balkans. This year, we organized a conference under the auspices of the Foundation of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess to address this issue.

The situation of children in armed conflict also remains a source of great concern. The reports prepared by the United Nations are appalling. Although the Organization does not remain passive in such situations, Member States do not always understand the full consequences of their actions. Initiatives to reduce funding for human rights protection or children in armed conflict when deciding on funding for United Nations peacekeeping operations are hard hearted and difficult to justify.

Those responsible for human rights violations in such situations must know that they too will one day be held accountable. Impunity cannot become the norm. The jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is not universal, but it is an integral part of the international system, and the Court's representatives must be able to travel and operate in that capacity without obstacles, including here in New York at United Nations Headquarters. When the ICC is unable to act, impartial and independent investigative mechanisms, such as those established by the General Assembly in the case of Syria and by the Human Rights Council in the case of Myanmar, provide an alternative.

The oppression of religious minorities and their lack of protection by the State have not been eliminated in the twenty-first century. In Asia, Africa, the Near and Middle East, countless women and men are persecuted. No distinction should be made between the rights of Christians, Jews or Muslims or members of any other faith. I know that Europe is not in a position to lecture others on this point. Barely seventy-five years after the liberation of the extermination camps in Europe, the European continent continues to have a duty to preserve and honour that memory, especially at a time when speeches invoke that same hatred, xenophobia, intolerance and anti-Semitism, which are all resurfacing in certain countries and in political speeches.

In January, we will commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army. I do not know if anyone has visited Auschwitz, but I can say clearly that it changed me. In the camp,

there are rooms filled with hair, rooms filled with glasses, rooms filled with prosthetic limbs, rooms filled with suitcases. Each item in these rooms was a life, a family. The people were condemned for being Jewish, for not espousing Nazi ideology, for being Gypsies, for being homosexuals, for being handicapped or simply being resisters. When I see that in certain countries there is a rise in revisionism, negationism, Nazism or Nazi ideology, I sometimes ask myself if we have ever truly learned anything from the Second World War.

Let me also say how unacceptable it is for State resources to be increasingly used to silence those who have dedicated themselves to the protection of human rights or the protection of the environment or to reporting the news. The work carried out within the Human Rights Council in Geneva on this issue is decisive and includes testimonies. Unfortunately, it is not only compliance with human rights that is being challenged. In recent years, we have seen the very existence of certain rights being called into question. We must admit that this is even true within our Organization's forums, with regard to sexual and reproductive rights, which is adversely affecting programmes aimed at supporting the reproductive health of millions of women all over the world. I am convinced that this also applies to abortion and the right of every woman to make decisions about her own body.

In the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, a number of years ago women could still have an abortion for therapeutic reasons or if they are in distress. The law was changed. Abortion was no longer possible for women in distress or for therapeutic reasons. Women were forced to be interviewed by a panel of strangers. That law was changed immediately. I think that abortion is one of the most difficult decisions a woman must face. Every woman therefore needs to be heard and needs help. It is not the job of politics what is or is not good for her in this regard. It is a decision to be taken only after due reflection and help for the woman or couple concerned. It is not up to politics to say what is good for women, much less is it the job of men to decide what women should or should not do. This situation has become very difficult to tolerate and accept in 2020 — tomorrow — to tell the other sex what is good for her. The woman already has a difficult decision to make. Let us not make her life more difficult by trying to make them feel bad for making that decision.

In 2020, we will also celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Conference, which

strengthened the Commission on the Status of Women. I sometimes wonder if today we would be able to renew the commitments undertaken on that occasion, when I hear the positions and statements of some people on the rights of women.

The same is true of the right to live according to one's sexual orientation. Here in New York, I was able to launch a debate on hate speech against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. A lot of work remains to be done. Homosexuality is not a choice. It is time to accept it as it is. What is a choice is homophobia. Let us not forget that.

This year we are also commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an almost universal convention. In this regard, I believe it is important to renew our commitments, including in the light of the developments that have taken place since its adoption, particularly in the field of climate and the digital economy.

My country's commitment to the promotion of human rights is part of its DNA, whether at the national, European or international level. It covers, without discrimination, the full range of rights recognized by our Organization, including economic and social rights. It is for these reasons that my country is a candidate for election as a member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2022-2024, for the first time since the Council was established. We count on the broad support of the General Assembly during the election in 2021.

I do not want to miss this opportunity to remind the Assembly how important it is that our Organization, which alone can claim to represent the international community, and which, in a way, is the international community itself, adapt to the realities of today's world. The reforms initiated by the Secretary-General have made good progress. We must now translate them into action on the ground, particularly in terms of development and the organization of the security pillar.

The adaptation efforts of all components of the United Nations system is a prerequisite for the living and dynamic multilateralism that the world needs. That was clearly the original goal of the signatories to the Charter of the United Nations, whose seventy-fifth anniversary we will have the opportunity to celebrate next year. Seventy-five years is also when Auschwitz was liberated, as I said earlier, and also when my country was liberated by the Allies. And, as I stand in our host State, the United States, I am convinced that

99.9 per cent of the soldiers buried in the American cemetery in my country would not even have been able to find Luxembourg on a map. Nevertheless, they fought so that I could live in peace. I will never forget our gratitude to the Allies and our host country. Today, I can live in freedom and freely express my opinion. These cemeteries are proof that war leaves scars that do not heal. We must never forget that.

The summits and our debate this week have shown us that the United Nations is essential if we are to look to the future with clarity and address the challenges facing humankind today. My country is ready. The European Union is ready. Together with our partners in the international community, we want to ensure that we move forward together, because we know that the road is often long and sometimes difficult.

(spoke in English)

So let us stop speaking about one another. Let us talk to one another.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister, Minister of State, Minister for Communications and Media and Minister for Worship of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister, Minister of State, Minister for Communications and Media and Minister for Worship of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 2.30 p.m.