



# General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

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Monday, 30 September 2019, 9 a.m.  
New York

Official Records

*President:* Mr. Muhammad-Bande ..... (Nigeria)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Shava (Zimbabwe), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

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

## Agenda item 8 (continued)

### General debate

**The Acting President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Osman Saleh Mohammed, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea.

**Mr. Mohammed (Eritrea):** The current General Assembly meeting is occurring at a very auspicious time for the Horn of Africa. Positive developments are under way in the region. The sad, painful chapter of domestic turmoil and regional conflicts is giving way to new vistas of internal resurgence and regional cooperation.

In global terms, this is a sensitive and delicate period, when the world is at a crossroads — on the cusp of a new world order, so to speak. All vital parameters indicate that the unipolar world order has come to an end or is in its twilight years. The economic power balance is inexorably changing, with a spike in attendant intense rivalries and upheavals. The current session of the General Assembly cannot but grapple with such issues and chart out a viable path for the way forward.

Africa's lot over the past quarter of a century has indeed been onerous. Africa's resources were plundered wantonly. Despite hollow phrases of "conflict prevention" and "conflict resolution", wars and upheavals continue to increase and fester. Almost

1 billion Africans remain marginalized through the collusion of external predators, their local surrogates and corrupt special-interest entities. That tragic reality requires the utmost and urgent attention for effective remedies, beyond sincere expressions of concern and understanding.

In that context, the Horn of Africa and Middle East regions have been immensely and inordinately afflicted in the past 25 years by externally instigated, intractable, internecine ethnic and clan conflicts, as well as discord and wars among neighbouring countries. As a result, they have been, and remain, hotbeds of instability and impoverishment.

That grim reality is in stark contrast to the promising events and hopes engendered in the early 1990s. However, the external and internal complications have obstructed and reversed the laudable initiatives for regional cooperation and integration that were expected at the time. Furthermore, such conditions have created vacuums and favourable climates for terrorist and other subversive forces to proliferate and expand. Here again, a large part of the blame falls on corrupt local actors that avidly sought to promote their narrow interests at the expense of their peoples.

All those tribulations notwithstanding, the numerous challenges and impediments that afflicted the Horn of Africa region have been overcome at this time. A new promising chapter is indeed likely again.

As always, we in the region are ready to work more resolutely with the requisite political will and determination to promote our collective growth

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through robust coordination and cooperation. We therefore wish to underline that ill-advised, obstructive and detrimental external interferences must cease fully in order to allow the region to effectively address its own matters.

In Eritrea, in addition to shouldering our regional responsibilities, we have embarked on a substantive and sustainable programme for economic and social development. We are building our human capital, improving our infrastructure and developing key productive and service sectors. We are also intensifying our efforts and significantly increasing investment to ensure that all citizens throughout the country enjoy adequate basic services of water, health care, education and transport, as well as a decent livelihood.

Eritrea has been making modest strides towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in their three dimensions — economic, social and environmental — with its long-standing policy of a balanced and integrated approach to development. In the past two decades, we have already achieved significant results in several pillars of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) despite limited material resources as well as crippling external adversity, including imposed war and sanctions. Most notable is Eritrea's achievement in the four health-related MDGs.

The Horn of Africa region is prone to drought and erratic rainfall. Eritrea's soil and water conservation strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change and achieve food security include building small, medium and large dams across the country and terracing its mountainous topography. Eritrea has been able to harvest adequate water, but it will require incorporating innovative water technologies to distribute that water efficiently. Eritrea's sustained tree-planting project, which also began in 1994, continues with the full participation of the population.

The international community will have to glean important lessons from the recent past to ensure that the current period, which many have termed a transition towards a new global order, will lead to and enhance global stability and prosperity. In that regard, it is both timely and proper to reform and strengthen the United Nations so that it can shoulder its obligations and responsibilities with greater effectiveness.

**The Acting President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ezéchiel Nibigira, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Burundi.

**Mr. Nibigira (Burundi)** (*spoke in French*): At the beginning of my statement, my delegation would first like to thank Almighty God, who has enabled for us to gather in this fine General Assembly Hall to discuss frankly the issues that we hold dear to our hearts in the name of humankind. We thank the host country and city for the kindness and well-known hospitality towards us since our arrival in this magnificent city of New York, Headquarters of the Organization. My delegation would also like to convey to Member States the warmest greetings and wishes for success at this meeting of the people of Burundi and His Excellency Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi, who honoured me with the task of representing him today.

Allow me to extend my warm congratulations to His Excellency Ambassador Tijjani Muhammad-Bande of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on his excellent election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth ordinary session. The great qualities and skills that we all recognize in him are undoubtedly a guarantee of the success of the work of this session, whose central theme "Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion" pragmatically deals with the key challenges facing the world today. The President can of course count on Burundi's full cooperation in the accomplishment of his noble and laudable task.

At the same time, my delegation would like to pay a well-deserved tribute to his predecessor, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, the fourth woman President of the General Assembly since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, not only for her admirable professional and personal qualities but also for the extremely professional way in which she presided over the seventy-third session that we have just successfully concluded. We also pay a well-deserved tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and his courageous action under way to reform our common Organization in order to increase its effectiveness and credibility and make it an institution that is close to its constituents.

Before continuing the substantive part of its statement, on behalf of the Government of Burundi, my delegation would also like to express its most heartfelt condolences and its solidarity with the peoples and Governments of the Republic of Zimbabwe and the Republic of Tunisia, as well as the French Republic, following the deaths of His Excellency Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe, former President and father

of Zimbabwe's independence, His Excellency Béji Caïd Essebsi, former President of Tunisia, and His Excellency Jacques Chirac, former President of the French Republic, respectively.

With regard to domestic policy, the preparations for the 2020 elections are well advanced both in terms of organization and budget. National mechanisms for the preparation of the elections are already in place, while calming measures to promote a climate conducive to the holding of free, transparent and peaceful elections are steadily increasing. Without being exhaustive, I would particularly mention, first, the adoption, following extensive consultations within the Burundian political class, of the Kayanza road map, laying the foundation for peaceful elections in 2020; secondly, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), which is already operational; thirdly, the adoption of the revised electoral code by Parliament in April 2019 by 105 votes in favour out of 108 votes; fourthly, the decision to fund the entire operational electoral budget without resorting to external resources, which are often unpredictable and conditional; and, fifthly, the publication by CENI of the electoral calendar for all elections scheduled for 2020.

In accordance with that timetable, the presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections will be held concurrently on 20 May 2020. The election campaign is to be held from 27 April to 17 May. The Senate election will take place on 20 July 2020 and the last election — the cantonal elections — is scheduled for 24 August 2020.

It is worth pointing out that the electoral process in Burundi, as elsewhere in the world, is an internal matter that is exclusively an issue of national sovereignty. Any support for the process must be provided at the request of the Government of Burundi, in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. If there is support, it must not sanction any acts of blatant interference.

Any attempt to create a new role or redefine an existing role within the United Nations at the instigation of certain States to conduct the elections in Burundi in place of the Burundians would be an attack on national sovereignty and a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, which stipulates in Article 2, paragraph 7: "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the

Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter[.]"

With regard to the calming measures to foster a climate conducive to peaceful and inclusive elections, I would mention, among other measures, first, the expansion of the political space in the country through the approval of new political parties and the promotion of freedom of expression; secondly, the decision of the President of the Republic to voluntarily waive his constitutional right to stand in the 2020 presidential elections, which is an act of great political and democratic value that could serve as an example throughout the continent and beyond; thirdly, the return and integration of refugees and political exiles returning in large numbers; fourthly, the promotion of political dialogue within the Permanent Forum of Political Parties; and, fifthly, the release at the beginning of the year of more than 2,000 prisoners, including the young rioters and insurgents of 2015.

In Burundi the dialogue between political parties towards holding peaceful elections in 2020 is proceeding smoothly in a spirit of openness and political tolerance. My delegation recalls that it was this almost continuous and effective dialogue that led to the adoption of the Kayanza road map for peaceful elections in 2020, the establishment of the CENI, the adoption of the electoral code by Parliament and the return to the country of several political leaders who had fled in 2015.

Foreign actors who apparently want to take the dialogue issue away from Burundi seek three things: first, to destabilize Burundi on the eve of the 2020 elections; secondly, to encourage the rebels of 2015 who are now on the run, sheltered, fed and protected by the same actors who have been diplomatically and politically attacking Burundi since 2015; and, thirdly, divert the attention of Burundians from the most essential, namely, the holding of the 2020 elections and implementing the national development plan.

All those external actors will have to face up to their responsibility in due course for all the consequences of their interference in matters falling within Burundi's sovereignty. Burundians and the world are watching them. For their part, the Burundian people will remain opposed, as a matter of principle, at all times, in all places and under all circumstances, to any attempt at foreign interference in handling issues within the national jurisdiction, whether by a State or a regional or international organization.

My delegation would like to remind this gathering that the effectiveness of the United Nations depends on its ability to preserve the ideals that led to its establishment in 1945 in the aftermath of a deadly war. We cannot make the United Nations an organization for all if the bold interference of certain Governments in the internal affairs of other sovereign countries is dangerously tolerated in violation of the Charter that is the very foundation of our Organization.

On the security front, the situation in Burundi is stable, calm and fully under control throughout the country. From north to south, west to east and in the centre, day and night Burundian citizens enjoy their civil and political rights in complete peace of mind. In order to preserve the hard-won peace, on 10 September His Excellency Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi, launched the thirteenth peace caravan, which travelled through the country's 18 provinces, supporting at every stage the citizen-led community development projects in the areas visited.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we welcome the massive and voluntary return of the Burundian refugees who fled the country in 2015. In addition to the several thousand Burundians who are returning of their own accord, without the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, between 1 August 2017 and 23 September 77,080 refugees, comprising 25,666 households, were voluntarily repatriated to Burundi from Tanzania, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That massive voluntary return movement clearly demonstrates the restoration of peace, tranquillity, trust and stability in the country despite the comments of some foreign actors who continue to deliberately exaggerate the number of refugees still in exile in order to keep Burundi in the state of a protracted crisis.

With regard to Burundi's presence on the Security Council's agenda, we have always said that Burundi is on the Security Council's agenda for political reasons and external interests that have nothing to do with the well-being of the Burundian people. The current political and security situation in the country does not constitute any threat to international peace and security so as to justify its arbitrary retention on the Security Council's agenda.

The successive meetings on Burundi that are not driven by the reality on the ground destabilize the country rather than promote peace and tranquillity.

Such inappropriate meetings indirectly assist the 2015 rebels who fled the country and are sought by Burundian justice. We therefore reiterate our legitimate call for Burundi's removal from the Security Council's agenda. The precious time devoted to Burundi can be allocated to the many other areas of tension. The situation in Burundi should be a matter for the United Nations agencies and programmes dealing with socioeconomic development in support of national efforts to implement the national development plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We firmly condemn the unjustified political and diplomatic aggression against Burundi and its people by foreign Governments, some of which were known to have attempted regime change in 2015 through unconstitutional means. Power diplomacy must give way to mutually beneficial and respectful cooperation. Such double standards and disproportionate and unjust pressure will bring us to our knees again 57 years after the end of colonization in our country, a terrifying period from which the Burundian people are still trying to recover today. The stubbornness of some countries to abandon their neocolonial logic causes them to behave as teachers of lessons, more than half a century after the attaining of independence of almost all African countries. The bitter fact of the matter is that interference in the internal affairs of States is becoming more and more commonplace, in contradiction of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The nature of relations between Africa and countries with a colonialist past should be redefined in order to transform the painful history of colonization into opportunities, through mutually beneficial and respectful cooperation.

It is time for foreign actors to stop infantilizing the Burundian people. Burundians are a proud and dignified people, very much committed to their political independence and values of *ubuntu*. We are mature enough to deal with our own affairs without any foreign interference, whether from countries close to or far from our borders. Any attempt to meddle in our internal affairs without first being invited to do so will always be met by an outburst of Burundian patriotism, as was the case during the regime-change conspiracy in 2015. We are aware that the 2015 conspiracy plot is not dead and buried — some are seeking to revive it by subtle means that are difficult to detect at first sight but will not escape the vigilance of the Burundian people.



With regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in addition to integrating the SDGs into our national development plans and programmes and aligning them with our national frameworks, the Government of Burundi has undertaken other practices to localize the SDGs by initiating a process of integrating them into our communes' plans for community development, as well as through monitoring the community dynamics observed in the implementation of the SDGs. Furthermore, given that the very heart of sustainable development is at the community level, all 119 communes in Burundi are currently in the process of drawing up or reviewing their plans for community development by integrating the objectives set forth in the SDGs and our national development plan.

Like other countries committed to sustainable development, Burundi has made every effort to produce a regular follow-up report on the implementation of the SDGs and our national development plan. To illustrate the path we have taken in implementing the SDGs, including our successes, current and emerging challenges and lessons learned, Burundi has already announced to the Economic and Social Council its intention to submit to the voluntary national review mechanism in 2020. We believe that in order for the SDGs that we all adopted in 2015 to become a reality, we need greater commitment, ambition, action and above all more resources.

With regard to global issues, the current session of the General Assembly provides an excellent opportunity for States Members of the United Nations to reflect on how our Organization should address new and emerging challenges. The world we live in today needs a consensual approach, now more than ever before, in order to confront such major challenges as climate change, terrorism, the peaceful settlement of conflicts, peacekeeping around the world, the reform of the Security Council, threats to multilateralism and the issue of migration.

In terms of climate, we reiterate that the planet on which we live and on which future generations will live is facing a climate crisis that is worsening day by day, with the dramatic rise of climate-sceptic leaders. The climate crisis is threatening to reverse decades of progress and undermines all projects undertaken to build inclusive and sustainable development. Meanwhile the clock continues to tick, and it will not stop and wait for us. The green and sustainable development that we

want — we want it now; waiting for tomorrow would be too late.

With regard to the fight against terrorism, we strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Burundi believes that terrorism cannot and should not be treated as an issue tied to any one religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic origin. It is a borderless threat that requires a global solution by tackling the root causes of the greatest evils of our times, including poverty, illiteracy, inequalities within and among States, ignorance, exclusion, humiliation and many others. Aware of the magnitude of the threat posed by terrorism today, Burundi will continue to make substantial contributions to combating terrorism in Somalia, where my country has already deployed more than 5,000 troops.

With regard to the issue of migration, the sobering fact is that forced mass population displacements are a global crisis, requiring collective action from the international community. It is now more likely than ever before that refugees and migrants will attempt to cross international borders to flee conflict, persecution, poverty and other life-threatening situations, in search of better life opportunities elsewhere. Their journeys involve considerable risks. Those who do reach their destination are frequently subjected to hostility and intolerance. The best solution to the migrant issue would be to strengthen cooperation and better distribute responsibilities.

Moving on to the reform of the Security Council — a topic that has been the subject of negotiations for more than a quarter of a century — Burundi remains firmly committed to the Common African Position as contained in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration. The Common African Position aims to correct the notorious injustice suffered by Africa, which is the only continent not represented on the Security Council in the category of permanent membership, and which is also underrepresented in the non-permanent category. For several years, Africa has repeatedly denounced that historical injustice, which continues to deprive more than 1.2 billion people of their legitimate right to be represented in the Security Council, with a permanent member enjoying the same privileges as current permanent members.

Multilateralism is currently under threat, and Burundi, like the overwhelming majority of States Members of the United Nations, rejects the growing

trend of seeking to use certain United Nations bodies, as well as political and military interventionism and unilateral coercive measures, to regulate geopolitics around the world by unconstitutional means that contradict international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

With regard to peace operations around the world, although they are far from perfect and despite the challenges we continue to face in this area, they remain very useful for ensuring the maintenance and consolidation of peace around the world. Accordingly, we advocate adequate, sustainable, predictable and flexible funding, including through mandatory United Nations contributions, in order to enable such Security Council-mandated peacekeeping missions of the United Nations and the African Union as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to carry out their missions correctly. Any disengagement must imperatively take into account the degree of threat on the ground, rather than withdrawing or reducing the number of troops solely on the basis of artificial durations and mathematical calculations. With more than 6,000 troops currently deployed in peacekeeping missions, Burundi wishes to reiterate, from this rostrum, its commitment to continuing to make substantial contributions to peace operations around the world. We make this commitment as a way of giving back because Burundi benefited from the support of other nations during the most difficult periods of its history, before the definitive restoration of peace and stability in the country.

At the continental level, Burundi fully supports the African Union initiative to silence the guns in Africa by 2020, which the Security Council supported in its resolution 2457 (2019). In this regard, we are encouraged by the new positive developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, the Sudan and South Sudan, as well as the new wind of hope blowing across the Horn of Africa, and not forgetting AMISOM's performance in restoring peace to the brotherly country of Somalia.

In conclusion, my country has never wavered in its belief in international solidarity, multilateralism and the rejection of muscular diplomacy. From this rostrum, Burundi reaffirms its commitment to playing its full part in building a new world order based on the rule of law and a world that is peaceful, fair, prosperous and respectful of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

**The Acting President:** I now call on His Excellency Dato Seri Setia Haji Erywan bin Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Haji Mohd Yusof, Second Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam.

**Dato Yusof** (Brunei Darussalam): It is a great honour and privilege to be here today to convey the warm greetings of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di Pertuan of Negara Brunei Darussalam to the General Assembly.

I wish to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on assuming the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. My appreciation also goes to Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés for her valuable contribution and dedication to the Assembly over the past year. I am also deeply grateful to Secretary-General António Guterres for his leadership and laudable initiatives that have given renewed impetus to our Organization, particularly in hosting the Climate Action Summit and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) summit.

In 2015, our leaders gathered in this Hall to adopt the landmark 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This remarkable feat is testament to the success of multilateralism. Today, we continue to honour this agenda through this session's theme, which is focused on galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion. The global consensus on this agenda is clear — our ability to fulfil the promise of the SDGs begins and ends with a commitment of the States Members of the United Nations to working together.

Our search for a better future is often mired in increasingly complex and interconnected challenges. More and more countries are struggling to address such overlapping concerns as deforestation and access to clean air. This struggle reflects the indivisibility and multidimensional nature of the SDGs, which must be addressed collectively and to the fullest extent possible. The path that each country takes in achieving its goals will be unique, but we recognize that all paths mutually reinforce one another. For its part, Brunei Darussalam will present its voluntary national review for the first time at next year's High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, where we will be happy to share our best practices, lessons learned and challenges encountered.

Globally, even though overall progress has been made, trends indicate that the pace of improvement is

too slow to ensure complete success by 2030. While we believe in the common pledge for no one to be left behind, we also recognize that no country can do it alone. We therefore welcome the call to accelerate collective actions, as contained in the political declaration adopted recently at the SDG summit (resolution 74/4). Success in achieving the SDGs will be a test of global cooperation, partnership and collaboration that requires action at the local, national and regional levels. To this end, we are working closely to advance a people-centred Association of Southeast Asian Nations community that complements the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

To localize the impact of the SDGs, Brunei Darussalam continues to undertake measures aimed at realizing the well-being, peace and harmony of its people. Our Government has ensured access to affordable housing and health care for all, as well as clean water and a clean environment. As a country with a young demographic, we also prioritize the education of our youth and recognize the importance of lifelong learning. Education will empower and better prepare our people, acting as a catalyst for achieving the SDGs and our own continued development. People need the tools to build a better life. In this regard, His Majesty's Government remains committed to providing free, high-quality education all the way to the tertiary level so that no Bruneian is left behind.

In our quest for progress, we have learned that there are costs associated with economic development. Perhaps the most common is damage to the environment. As citizens of the world, we are all stakeholders in ensuring a healthy planet. There is a shared global responsibility incumbent upon all of us to be principled in our undertakings, be it Governments, the private sector, individuals, corporate players or investors. We must ensure a universal commitment in order to overcome this existential threat and effectively work towards building a sustainable future.

The effects of climate change are being felt now and they will only get worse. We are at a critical juncture and stand at the precipice of making significant changes so as to reverse the climate crisis and secure the right of future generations to live in a sustainable world. There is a vested interest in ensuring our legacy as problem solvers and not problem makers. Technological advancements and innovations have made it possible for us to engineer modern solutions to modern challenges. We therefore believe that more needs to be done in sharing and transferring technology, so that we can all

move from reactive responses to proactive solutions on climate change.

The digital revolution has redefined social interaction, intensified e-commerce and expanded information-sharing. However, we need to prevent the malicious use of these technologies. Although technology like the Internet can be positive, it has also given rise to an age of unprecedented misinformation and manipulation. The rampant misuse of the Internet and social media spreads hatred, incites violence and even glorifies acts of crime and terrorism. While we must adapt to technological advances, it is also urgent that we collectively address the emerging threats they can pose.

Despite our best efforts, an increase in conflicts around the world has left many displaced, destitute and vulnerable. We see the perpetual struggle of the Palestinian people for Statehood and their inalienable right to self-determination being continually neglected. Prolonged occupation, forced displacement and illegal settlements have deprived them of every human right. This seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly has heard repeated calls for no one to be left behind. However, the Palestinian people have been left behind for as long as they have been fighting for their existence. As the premier multilateral forum, the United Nations has an unequalled role in ensuring the achievement of a just solution that establishes a sovereign State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

As we move towards the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations next year, this milestone presents a good opportunity for us to reflect on all the work we have done and where we are going. The reality of our world today demands concerted and collective action. I believe the United Nations is now more relevant than ever. We must reconnect with the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, which enshrines the equality of nations and the multilateralism that respects the individuality and independence of all States. Collectively, we depend on the United Nations to uphold the sovereign right of all nations to choose a path and policies that resonate with their own customs and traditions. It is not a time to retreat, but rather to push forward and strengthen multilateralism, so we can fulfil the varied needs of the global community and permit everyone to enjoy peace, prosperity and development.

**The Acting President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rodolfo Nin Novoa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay.

**Mr. Nin Novoa (Uruguay)** (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to extend to Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session, a well-deserved recognition for her excellent leadership of the main organ of the United Nations system. As the first woman from Latin America and the Caribbean to be elected President, she not only represented Latin Americans, but also women from all over the world.

I would also like to congratulate the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. We wish him every success in the discharge of his duties and pledge the commitment of our entire delegation.

I cannot touch upon the central theme of this debate without first making some observations that put it in context. We are today living through a difficult global situation of great uncertainty, product of the clash of opposing forces struggling to establish a new world order, often without considering the serious consequences of their actions for world peace — that utopia we yearn for in which all people can live in a state of happiness and freedom, with their basic needs met and without fear of suffering least of all deprivation of their rights and security.

A quick glance at the planet suffices to realize the fragility of the foundations that underpin peaceful coexistence among States. The tension in Western Asia and the Middle East, the political and economic upheaval in Europe, hunger and malnutrition in Africa and the alarming spread of extreme ideologies are additional risk factors beyond the power struggle among the various Powers vying for domination, whether in the form of trade wars or ideological wars.

We are gravely concerned about the withdrawal of the United States from the nuclear treaty with Iran, a hard-won agreement, which casts a shadow over the future of peace in that fragile region and could lead Iran to resume its nuclear programme, with unforeseeable consequences for international peace and security. Uruguay, a firm champion of denuclearization, urges the parties to reconsider their positions and act with a universal conscience by putting aside rhetoric to

score short-term political gains at the cost of dire global consequences.

Similarly, my country is concerned about the proliferation of arms, especially small arms and light weapons. The indiscriminate access of private individuals to such weapons in countries with permissive legislation is responsible for a growing trend of vigilante justice.

In Latin America we are deeply alarmed by the spread of extreme ideologies that seek to forcibly apply their methods in other countries, thus shamelessly violating the authority of regional organizations and generating situations of crisis and violence as an excuse to impose their doctrines by force and plunder the Latin American peoples for their own benefit. We are even more concerned that some Governments in the region embrace those same ideologies and procedures, the use of which has had significant adverse effects still evokes bitter memories.

We cannot allow the principle of non-intervention to be a protective barrier to enable grave violations of human rights. Nor can we tolerate foreign intervention under the pretext of defending democracy, all the while terrorizing the population with the threat of an allegedly liberating invasion whose only certain results would be the loss of thousands of innocent lives and the suffocation of many others through economic sanctions that would plunge them into deeper poverty, as is currently the case with Venezuela. Only dialogue and understanding between the parties can lead to a peaceful solution to the crisis.

In a similar vein, we again raise our voice in this Assembly, as we have done for 27 years, to strongly condemn the savage and illegal commercial and financial blockade that has been applied for more than 50 years against the Republic of Cuba. Illegal sanctions that run counter to international law have impoverished the people of Cuba, and their grave consequences are detrimental to the future of the women and men of that brotherly Latin American country.

Uruguay has a long tradition of defending multilateralism, democracy, self-determination and the protection and promotion of human rights. We come to this Hall today to renew our commitment to fighting for solutions based on dialogue, peace, democracy and the full enjoyment of human rights when it comes to addressing conflicts generated in our region.



Uruguay considers the Security Council to be the only organ with the competence to apply measures against a Member State for the purpose of maintaining or restoring international peace and security or to determine whether the use of force is warranted under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. The world has made progress in building this institutional architecture, which, with its strengths and weaknesses, must be defended — and Uruguay, which believes in international law as the guarantor of peaceful coexistence among nations, will always do so.

For that reason, it participates actively in the maintenance of international peace and security, through peace operations to which it contributes substantial contingents. In fact, Uruguay is the top personnel contributor in the entire Western Hemisphere. As a founding member of the United Nations, Uruguay is deeply committed to multilateralism in all spheres, not only as protection against more powerful actors, but also as a framework for faithfully fulfilling its own obligations.

Four years ago, the States Members of the United Nations committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), some of which serve as inspiration for this general debate. In this regard, Uruguay has responsibly assumed its commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which fully match the policies it has been implementing over the past 15 years, as my country has been integrating the SDGs at the national, departmental and local levels. In 2017, 2018 and 2019, in order to properly ensure accountability, my country submitted voluntary reports that take stock of the significant progress we have made in each of the 17 Goals.

In my view, there are three cross-cutting vectors within the Sustainable Development Goals — the elimination of poverty, the fight against climate change and quality education.

Allow me first to focus on the worst global scourge, the greatest enemy of peace, the cause of most of the ills of our era and the enemy we should focus all our efforts towards exterminating — poverty. If we eliminate poverty, we can universalize education and do away with the education deficit. If we eliminate poverty, we would be reducing harm to the environment. If we eliminate poverty, we will be eliminating hunger, exclusion and discrimination. If we eliminate poverty, we will finally

approach the state of well-being to which I referred at the beginning of my statement — world peace.

The equitable distribution of wealth and the eradication of extreme poverty are a priority objective for the Government of Uruguay. We are committed to definitively eradicating extreme poverty and indigence by 2030 and have been working for 15 years to achieve this objective. It is with great satisfaction that we can say today, in this Hall, that in Uruguay there is not a single child sleeping on the streets.

The year 2005 marked a milestone in the fight against poverty and extreme poverty in Uruguay. In order to respond to the needs of the Uruguayan people, we undertook key institutional innovations and promoted normative reforms that have expanded social protections. This new institutional framework focused on social policies, increased public spending and launched a comprehensive strategic planning programme in this area. All this took place in the context of uninterrupted economic growth over the past 15 years. In addition, our country opted for decent work, providing more guarantees and rights to workers, including the right to social security and free medical care for rural and domestic workers, who have historically been neglected.

Those public policies have been critical for the Government to fulfil its social inclusion goals, which it has done with such remarkable success that, at the most recent International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization, a private-sector representative complained that, in its view, the Government has granted workers too many rights. As a result of those same social policies, the total number of people living below the poverty line has been reduced to 8 per cent, the lowest in Latin America, with indigence standing at 0.1 per cent and inequality at 0.38 per cent, making Uruguay the most egalitarian country in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The rights agenda for which Uruguay is internationally recognized has also significantly contributed to the advancement of a freer and more democratic society. After all, we are one of the few full democracies in the world based on a strong institutional framework and the strength of traditional political parties, the oldest of which have existed for 200 years and the youngest of which has been around for half a century. Our robust institutions have allowed Uruguay to avoid the wave of corruption that shook the region.

Although personal wealth worldwide has grown exponentially in the past 20 years, 736 million human beings live in extreme poverty. Less than 10 per cent of the world's population holds 86 per cent of global wealth, while 70 per cent shares a mere 2.7 per cent of the wealth. In addition, 96 per cent of the world's poor live in various Asian countries, in Africa and in Latin America.

Driven by the explosion of digital technology and the growth of emerging economies and the global economy after the financial crisis at the start of the century, the world's wealth has increased by 66 per cent compared to the year 1995. However, that increase in wealth has not ended poverty or reduced inequality. On the contrary, they have increased. Today, the wealth per capita of the high-income member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is 52 times that of low-income countries. This is a major challenge for the United Nations. Only with enhanced institutions and exemplary legitimate governance can we make progress in managing the complex global processes that lead to inequality.

We are not utopian, but we believe that it is possible and necessary to take steps towards a gradual but effective action that will make it possible to reverse the abysmal and shameful inequality on the planet. This inequality significantly affects the entire edifice of rights and tends to turn it, not infrequently, into a formalism of little substance, valuable only as a proclamation of what should be, but not very real and present in the daily life of many nations.

To end poverty and reduce inequality, we must invest in people, the most important component of the wealth of nations. Women account for less than 40 per cent of global wealth because they continue to earn less than men throughout their lives. Achieving gender equality would increase human capital by almost 20 per cent. That is why Uruguay inserts a chapter on trade and gender, with an inclusive approach, in all of its trade agreements, as was the case in our recent agreements with Chile, with our Southern Common Market partners and with Canada. That is why it is important for States to design and implement fair and balanced social policies aimed at reducing inequalities, ending poverty and narrowing the existing gaps in our societies, thereby offering everyone a better, fairer and more hopeful future.

Numerous studies show the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon of poverty, which can only be addressed through comprehensive policies that can build sustainable solutions. Without such a multidimensional approach, there will be 1 billion people living in poverty by 2050, with the lowest-income countries experiencing the highest population growth. All States must consider the multidimensional approach, since poverty is a problem that afflicts all societies in the world, which is why multilateral efforts are the key to eradicate it.

Secondly, with regard to the fight against climate change, if we are to succeed, we must be aware that the harmful effects of climate change directly affect the increase in poverty and global economic and social inequality. By 2050, climate change could displace 140 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America alone.

The severity of environmental degradation has reached levels beyond what is tolerable. The commitment of all Members of the United Nations is essential to stopping environmental damage and to trying to reverse its bleak consequences. The devastating fires that have ravaged California, Siberia, Bolivia and Chile this year, in addition to those in the Brazilian Amazon, seriously threaten biodiversity and the balance of the planet's largest ecosystem. Governments have an obligation to protect biodiversity as our common heritage and legacy for future generations.

Uruguay reaffirms its willingness to work together with all countries committed to the protection and safeguarding of the environment, in accordance with the principles established in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted in 1992, and the commitments made in the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and makes a fervent appeal to Governments to seriously address this real threat to the stability and equilibrium of the globe. In this regard, my delegation reiterates its full support for the twenty-fifth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Santiago in December, and congratulates Costa Rica on its commitment to the environment and its efforts to accelerate climate action at the pre-Conference meeting it will host in October. Given the risk that climate change poses, Uruguay has been adopting policies that place it among the most advanced countries of the world in the field, including its salient national energy policy

through which it achieved generating 98 per cent of its electricity through renewable energy sources.

As nations, we have the responsibility of pooling our efforts to agree on educational policies that allow us to deepen the integration of climate change throughout the educational process and to contribute to increasing the awareness of our peoples with respect to the challenges it poses. Only in this way will we be better prepared to face its negative effects and therefore achieve a more resilient international society that is less vulnerable, with greater capacity to adapt to change and climate variability and more aware and responsible given the challenge. An active and conscious citizenry, with an education guided by that awareness, will act as an effective means of controlling Governments and private enterprise, thereby enhancing cooperation with the safeguarding of the environment.

Thirdly, I will address education. In order to provide quality education, it is necessary to be prepared to face the use of technology and its democratization. Rapid technological advances in artificial intelligence are transforming societies by changing the way people learn, work and live together. Education systems could use artificial intelligence to change their management, teaching and learning.

Each of the goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires education to equip all people with the knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to live with dignity, build their own lives and contribute to the societies in which they live. However, serious difficulties unfortunately persist. According to UNESCO, 262 million children and young people do not attend primary or secondary school, and 750 million adults are illiterate, all of which contribute to increased poverty and marginalization. Aid to education has stagnated since 2010, and only one third of it is allocated to primary and secondary education in low- and middle-income countries.

In Uruguay, we are absolutely convinced that the key to facing those challenges lies in the universalization of education. Education is a human right — an invisible engine of sustainable development and peace. Because of Uruguay's free, secular and obligatory education, 98.6 per cent of its population is literate, 99 per cent of five-year-old children are in school and 100 per cent of its public and private primary schoolteachers are credentialled.

Uruguay has chosen to embrace the concept of transformation with equity, and within that framework, it has developed public policies that have had a direct impact on reducing the digital divide. The introduction of technology was a fundamental tool for equity and social inclusion — values that are at the heart of our digital public policies — in addition to widely known projects, such as universal access to the Internet, livestock traceability and Plan Ceibal, through which Uruguay became the first country in 2009 to ensure that every school-age child had a laptop for personal use. More recently, a new plan was launched that universalizes the use of laptops and tablets among the elderly.

For those reasons, it is not surprising that since February 2018 Uruguay has been part of the group of the most digitally advanced countries, the so-called Digital 9, the chairmanship of which it has held since February. The next summit of the group will be held in Montevideo in November. However, countries such as Uruguay, which are on the path to development, still need a redesigned and refocused form of cooperation to support it in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by bridging the structural gaps that still persist.

As Uruguayan President Tabaré Vázquez did before the General Assembly last year (see A/73/PV.8), we reaffirm the concept of development in transition, and we will continue to fight so that development is no longer measured solely in terms of per capita income — an indicator that ignores the existing gaps among the various sectors of each country, denies the reality of the most vulnerable groups and poses a very serious risk of reversing the progress so laboriously achieved by our Governments on social issues.

*The President took the Chair.*

Change is in our hands. By placing human beings at the centre of public policies, we will contribute to reducing inequalities, combating poverty and making this planet a better place every day, by giving everyone hope for a better, fairer future with better opportunities, free of hunger, poverty and exclusions, and in which peace prevails.

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.

**Mr. Pramudwinai (Thailand):** On behalf of the proud nation of the Kingdom of Thailand, I would like

to say to the Greta Thunberg generation of the world that we have heard their heartfelt plea to preserve and protect their planet and their livelihood. In fact, it is the duty of all of us who gather in this forum to demonstrate that we are trying in good faith to do our very best and that we will continue to do so.

The world is witnessing a sea of change in many respects, and with it, challenges and opportunities abound. The twenty-first century is often described as the Age of Disruption. The question is whether we are all ready for it.

Growth and prosperity require peace. Political and economic advancements require stability. Technology requires conscience. Environmental preservation requires hard work and sacrifice. Progress requires sustainability. These tautological notions are age-old, yet their achievement remains elusive. The thorniest question is not the why, but the how — specifically, how to meet those requisites and reach the desired objectives.

The past few years have seen accelerating retrenchment from multinationalism to misguided nationalism, from globalization to anti-globalization, from free trade and a rising-tide-lifts-all-boats mentality to beggar-thy-neighbour policies and mercantilism. We have also been observing a worsening wealth gap, environmental degradation, segregation instead of inclusion and a winner-takes-all approach, all of which lead to conflict and confrontation. This is a great tragic irony because we are living in a world where connectivity and interconnection are the norm rather than the exception. And yet we still manage to dig in our heels in the trenches we ourselves dug, steadfastly clinging to posts that are extremely wide apart, often merely for myopic, self-serving reasons. Reaching out is considered weakness rather than strength.

Meanwhile, the fourth industrial revolution has arrived, whether or not we are prepared for it, bringing with it an avalanche of technological advancements that will have far-reaching and weighty ramifications for all matters affecting our lives, livelihoods and future. More seriously, unlike the previous three industrial revolutions, the fourth will give us little or no time to adjust. Therefore, in addition to the worsening traditional challenges with which we are relatively familiar, we now have to overcome new, unfathomable non-traditional challenges in the realm of technology. How successful we are in dealing with them will determine the future of humankind. Nations have no

choice but to put our heads together — not against one another — so as to get through this latest round of trials and tribulations and come out ahead.

That is one reason why Thailand, as Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) this year, chose the theme of advancing partnership for sustainability to be the core focus of ASEAN's goals and undertakings. Embedded in the notions of partnership and sustainability is the fundamental requirement of a mindset that calls for conflict to be turned into cooperation. These notions also entail inclusiveness and far-sightedness, through which the prisoner dilemma and lopsided short-term gain would be replaced with sustainable, long-term advancements that reflect the principles of shared interest and mutual benefit.

At the margins of the opening of the seventy-fourth session, our Prime Minister attended three leadership events, thereby reflecting Thailand's resolute commitment to the respective topics, namely, universal health coverage, climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For Thailand, these causes are not just abstract; we have realized them in earnest through the implementation of policies, because they matter so much to the livelihoods not only of our peoples but also of people around the world.

Thailand now ranks sixth globally in terms of our health-care system. Providing health care is not an easy task considering the countless competing demands on our resources. It requires a balanced approach to managing budgets and setting priorities. It also requires unwavering political will on the part of the leadership to remain on track despite all the distracting claims against it. Our achievements speak volumes about Thailand's commitment to the people-centric policy that aims at leaving no one behind.

On climate change, as Chair of ASEAN, Thailand has pressed successfully for our regional grouping to adopt, for the first time, a collective stand on one of the most critical environmental disasters, namely, marine debris. We also ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, because we believe that environmental crises are a global problem and that they therefore demand a global solution and a collaborative global effort. The acceleration of environmental degradation at rates never seen before obliges all of us to do more to right the wrongs we have committed against the environment. For so long, we have taken



the sustenance of nature for granted, and nature has suffered boundlessly from both neglect and abuse. This time, nature is getting back at us, telling us this far but no further.

As for the Sustainable Development Goals, Thailand has adopted the sufficiency economy philosophy espoused by our late King Rama IX, as its fundamental approach to the SDGs. In fact, if the philosophy is adequately and wisely implemented, SDG 1, on poverty eradication, will no longer need to be part of the equation. In fact, as the Chair of the Group of 77 two years ago, Thailand shared this approach with the members of the Group. Striving for balance between development and progress and between social factors and coherence is inherent to the approach. Without balance, the road out of an economically deprived existence for millions of people will lead nowhere.

The foregoing three issues have been among the pillars of our Government's foreign policy. Equally important is our recognition that none of them can be achieved without preserving their underpinning prerequisites, namely, peace and stability. That leads us to our current dedicated efforts, which we are undertaking together with other ASEAN members, to push for partnership and turn conflicts into cooperation so that development and progress can be sustainable. This approach may sound too idealistic given the current global trend of choosing confrontation over dialogue to settle our differences, but, in fact, it is not. Essentially, it is the duty of all of us gathered in this Hall today to give partnership and cooperation a chance and prove that, with a different mindset, peace and common benefits can be achieved and sustained and that they are not mere reflections of an idealist's zeal, with no practical wherewithal or real-life application.

The onerous task for us is how to convince all nations, large and small, that in the face of our current tumultuous challenges, both traditional and technological, and for the sake of future generations, there is absolutely no room for winner-takes-all and zero-sum mindsets. We shall sink or swim together, not alone, and not at the expense of others drowning. It is a not such a bad cliché at this juncture to say that we are all in the same boat, all of us together.

Lastly, we have to address the rising anti-globalization movement. It is the elephant in the room that the world can no longer afford to ignore. The movement, including xenophobic populism,

stems mainly from the disenfranchisement people feel from economic globalization, which in many cases leads to what the British economist William Forster Lloyd dubbed "the tragedy of the commons". Many anti-globalization activists do not oppose globalization in general; they simply want to change the way it has been allowed to run unchecked, resulting in exclusion, alienation, human rights violations, unfair trade and development that is detrimental rather than beneficial to many segments of society.

Military conflicts and extreme climate change, both of which trigger ravages and mass migration, exacerbate the rising distrust and disgruntlement that has been thrown into the mix of the anti-globalism narrative and actions. That is why Thailand has been promoting its people-centric national and international policy as an essential part of our economic and social development policies. Needless to say, each nation, individually and collectively, must put the balanced improvement of the livelihood of its people at the top of its priorities. We must foster the development model that aims at leaving no one behind. It is the duty of every Government and the United Nations to create and adopt an approach to growth that gives a chance to people at large, and not just a privileged few. To do otherwise would lead to the subsidence of the economic order and widespread calamity.

Thailand is a country that geographically straddles two vast oceans — the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. Throughout time, Thailand has conscientiously maintained its centrality, while promoting partnership via regionalism and multilateralism. History has shown us time and again that the great Powers are first in line to write the rules. History has also shown us that the privileges that come with great strength do have limits. Most importantly, privilege comes with even greater responsibility and accountability.

Without due regard to the lessons that history has taught us, we shall remain trapped in the vicious circle that has brought this body into existence in the first place. We owe it to future generations to prevent history from repeating itself. To that end, Thailand has been trying to do its part, and we are certain that we are not alone. We would also like to believe that it is the reason why we are gathering in this Hall today. If we fail to learn from history how to conduct ourselves differently, all shall be lost, including our collective future.

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Dionisio da Costa Babo Soares, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

**Mr. Soares** (Timor-Leste) (*spoke in Portuguese; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): At the outset, allow me on behalf of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. We are certain that your leadership, Sir, will steer the session in a positive direction. I wish also to convey our gratitude and congratulations to your predecessor, Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for the manner in which she led the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, as well as the strides made in the commitments undertaken.

Our delegation appreciates and welcomes your choice, Mr. President, for the theme of this session. Both the theme and the priorities established for the session reflect the major global challenges that we face, namely, the eradication of poverty, respect for human rights, inclusion, conflict prevention and climate change.

We are deeply grateful to Secretary-General António Guterres for convening the Climate Action Summit and bringing the world's attention to the grave crisis facing humankind. Like all other small island developing States (SIDS), Timor-Leste feels the effects of climate change on our coastal zones, crop yields due to the increasingly prolonged dry seasons, and the destruction caused by the intensity of natural disasters.

We need to save our planet from the effects of climate change and global warming. Unfortunately, to date, we have not changed our behaviour enough to prevent climate change on our planet. However, if we work together, we believe that in the few years that remain we can ensure that the Earth will undergo an average temperature increase of no more than 1.5°C. And although our emissions are below 0.003 per cent of global greenhouse-gas emissions, Timor-Leste is committed to contributing to global mitigation efforts by promoting such renewable energies as those derived from hydro, solar or biomass sources.

My country's Government is currently working on policies, laws and regulations related to climate change, including disaster-risk-management policies and a law on renewable energy. Furthermore, in other sectors related to mitigation, we are working on forest

conservation and promoting organic farming. In the area of adaptation, Timor-Leste has developed a national adaptation action plan, and its priorities are already being implemented at the local and community levels. We call on all nations, especially major emitters, to also adopt the necessary measures to stop global warming.

Four years ago, we adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We have a little over 10 years to attain the necessary transformation through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Unfortunately, we are failing in our progress to meet some of the targets contained in the SDGs. Inequalities persist, as does poverty. We fully join the decade of action for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its fundamental priorities, namely, the eradication of poverty and the promotion of equality and peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

Poverty eradication is our main goal, which is why it is part and parcel of our national strategic development plan to establish short-, medium- and long-term programmes to implement and strengthen social, economic and infrastructure development and transform institutional frameworks. We will therefore continue to improve our conditions to create investment opportunities and diversify our socioeconomic development, specifically in the areas of education, health care, mortality reduction, child nutrition and job creation for youth. Through this national strategy, we aim to eradicate poverty and unemployment and thereby liberate our people.

With respect to the preservation of the environment, including marine conservation, Timor-Leste has adopted a zero-plastic policy, which is just one of our national campaigns against pollution. We are also in the process of establishing a plastic-recycling plant that will enable our country to become plastic-neutral. We have two marine-protected areas that cover more than 586 square kilometres of our seas. We are blessed with extensive marine biodiversity and a cetacean-migration corridor, the protection of which is an integral part of our tourism and blue-economy policy. The second United Nations Ocean Conference, to be held in Lisbon next year, together with the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030, will provide us with the opportunity to evaluate the progress made on SDG 14 and our continued efforts to protect the oceans.

My country fully acknowledges and supports the current bilateral negotiations on the biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. We hope that they will result in collective consensus and that a legally binding international instrument is adopted to ensure the distribution of the benefits from the shared heritage of humankind.

We are also gathered at the United Nations in New York for the sake of peace, stability and international security. The delegation of Timor-Leste recognizes that the international community continues to be committed to finding solutions to the issues of Palestine, Western Sahara, Syria, Yemen, the Korean peninsula, and hopefully other conflicts as well.

With regard to the Korean peninsula, we commend North Korea and the United States for engaging in political dialogue to achieve peace. We hope that this dialogue will continue and contribute to ensuring peace, security and regional stability, and reduce nuclear tensions in the region.

Timor-Leste further reaffirms its support for a two-State solution to the issue of Palestine and calls on the international community to redouble its efforts aimed at finding a just, peaceful and lasting solution that enables Palestine to become a full-fledged State.

The third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, designated by the General Assembly, will end in 2020. Since Timor-Leste's independence in 2002, no solution has been found to decolonize any of the other 17 listed non-self-governing territories. We acknowledge the efforts of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Mr Horst Köhler. We hope that, upon the nomination of a new Personal Envoy, discussions will resume, and that a political and legal solution will be found to enable the people of Western Sahara to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

Timor-Leste continues to be concerned about the economic, commercial and financial blockade that has been imposed on Cuba for more than six decades and has had a major impact on the country's people and development. Timor-Leste therefore firmly supports the lifting of the economic, trade and financial embargo and opposes all extraterritorial measures.

With respect to Syria, we hope that the agreement reached between the Government and the representatives of the opposition to establish a constitutional committee

will produce results and bring an end to a war that has caused terrible suffering for the civilian population, particularly children and women.

I take this opportunity to briefly update the Assembly on the general situation in my country. Our young democracy continues on the path towards consolidation. Timor-Leste is a determined small nation under ongoing construction. We have held several elections, which confirm our evolution. As a democratic and peaceful country, Timor-Leste remains committed to building a State based on the rule of law and good governance, strengthening State institutions, promoting human rights and gender equality, and combating poverty.

Recently in Dili, our Prime Minister, Mr. Taur Matan Ruak, and the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. Scott Morrison, concluded the process of delimiting our maritime boundaries through the exchange of notes relevant to the ratification of the maritime-boundary treaty.

Gender equality and parity are fundamental goals of Timor-Leste. We have made significant progress in terms of women's political participation, with 38 per cent of our parliamentarians being women. We have adopted an action plan to combat gender-based violence, including an integrated victim-support programme, the promotion of economic-empowerment programmes and awareness-raising campaigns. We also adopted a plan of action in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will provide us with an opportunity to both jointly assess the progress made and identify the obstacles and challenges facing its implementation.

Timor-Leste continues to maintain strong and special cooperative ties with our closest neighbours, Indonesia and Australia. We have deepened our relations not only with those countries, but also with all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and we are patiently waiting for a decision on our request to join the Association. We also maintain special friendly relations of cooperation with the countries of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, of which we are proud members. We are certain that the Portuguese language, spoken by approximately 268 million people throughout the world, will be the next official language of the United Nations.

Timor-Leste continues to promote peacebuilding and State-building through sharing its experience in the areas of reconciliation, justice, solidarity and technical assistance related to elections with the States members of the Group of Seven Plus (g7+). The g7+ is an intergovernmental platform comprising countries emerging from or in conflict. We hope that, during this session of the General Assembly, the g7+ will obtain observer status in the General Assembly, and we call all Member States to accede to this request. Timor-Leste is also committed and stands ready to contribute police and military contingents to peace operations.

On the 30 August, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the 1999 referendum organized by the United Nations. Last week, on 27 September, we celebrated the seventeenth anniversary of our admission as a full State Member of the United Nations. We enjoy a historic relationship with the United Nations, which has a permanent and very special place in our hearts and in the collective memory of the people of Timor-Leste.

In conclusion, I emphasize that Timor-Leste continues to be an example of what the United Nations does best — resolving conflicts and maintaining peace and the international rules-based order — when its Member States pool their efforts. Five high-level summits — the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the high level-meeting on universal health coverage, the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, the High-level Review of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway and the Climate Action Summit — have alerted us to the huge challenges facing us today, which require collective action, cooperation, joint efforts, renewed political will and solidarity so that we can effectively ensure that all our citizens, including women, children and the elderly, can benefit from the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and live in dignity and peace.

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Kim Song, Chair of the Delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

**Mr. Kim Song** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Sir, I would first like to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-

fourth session. I express the hope that, under your able guidance, Mr. President, this session will be crowned with a successful outcome.

The current session of the General Assembly is being held at a time when the global focus on and demand for achieving world peace and development are increasing at an unprecedented rate. Peace and development — a shared aspiration of the present era — are pillars of the United Nations work and the main goals on which all United Nations activities are predicated. Despite the efforts of a large number of States Members of the United Nations, achieving peace and development continues to face serious challenges stemming from the flagrant violation, within the international arena, of the principles of respect for sovereignty and sovereign equality, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Unilateralism, which values strength as the ultimate means for achieving goals, is infringing on the sovereignty of many countries, creating widespread tension in international relations and posing a threat to achieving peace and development. The Security Council, which shoulders the responsibility of ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security, has been reduced to an instrument serving the strategic interest of a specific country that pursues sanctions, exerts pressure and attempts regime change in specific countries — all in total disregard of international justice.

In view of the international situation over the past year, the United Nations must further enhance its role. The prevailing reality wherein principles of respect for sovereignty and sovereign equality are being flagrantly violated stands as a sobering lesson that true peace and security can be achieved only when States possess powerful strength of their own.

In his historic policy speech in April, Comrade Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, advanced the country's central tasks at its present stage of consolidating the material foundations of socialism by focusing all its efforts on building the economy and developing an elucidated and reasonable way to ensure peace on the Korean peninsula. The present situation, which is marked by increased hostile acts against our country, demands that we hold higher the banners of self-sufficiency and self-reliance in order to consolidate socialism. We have the solid foundations of a self-supporting economy, reliable scientific and



technical strengths, and an invaluable tradition of self-reliance, which are our most precious strategic resources, and we would not trade them for anything. Under the seasoned leadership of Comrade Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission, our people are now making devoted efforts aimed at resolutely overcoming difficulties and challenges and at glorifying our Republic as an independent powerful country — a country of the people, whose ideals are fully realized.

The key to consolidating peace and stability and achieving development on the Korean peninsula is in the full implementation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States joint statement agreed and adopted at the historic summit and talks between the two countries that were held in Singapore in June 2018. More than a year has passed since the adoption of the 12 June Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States joint statement. However, the relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States have made little progress so far, and the Korean peninsula continues to experience a vicious cycle of increased tension that is entirely attributable to the political and military provocations perpetrated by the United States, which has resorted to its anachronistic hostile policy against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In his historic policy speech, Comrade Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission, stated his position that the United States needs to put aside its current method of calculation and approach us with a new one, and that we would patiently wait for a courageous decision from the United States. In our assumption that the United States has had enough time to come up with a calculation method that it can share with us, we have expressed our willingness to sit with the United States for a comprehensive discussion of the issues on which we have deliberated so far. Depending on the outcome, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-United States negotiations can either become a window of opportunity or an occasion that will hasten a crisis.

The historic Panmunjom Declaration on Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, which was well received by our friends in the north, south and overseas, as well as the international community, when it was submitted to the General Assembly just one year ago, is now at a standstill and has not even advanced to the main phase of its implementation. That

can be attributed to the double-dealing behaviour of the South Korean authorities, who performed a handshake of peace before the people of the world but behind the scenes introduced ultra-modern offensive weapons and held joint military exercises targeting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with the United States.

The introduction of the latest offensive weapons and the United States-South Korea joint military exercises targeting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea constitute flagrant violations and challenges to the implementation of the military agreements outlined in the Panmunjom Declaration, wherein the two sides agreed to completely cease all hostile acts against each other and refrain from building up armed forces. The improvement of inter-Korean relations can be achieved only when the South Korean authorities put an end to their worship of big Power and their policy of dependence on foreign forces that encroach upon the common interests of the nation and fulfil their responsibility to their nation by implementing the existing inter-Korean declarations in good faith.

The theme of the general debate for this session, "Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion", reflects the most essential points of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by the States Members of the United Nations by 2030. The Government and the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are now actively striving to fulfil the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs through our vigorous struggle to build a powerful socialist country, uphold the banner of self-reliance, and, in 2020, submit the country's first voluntary national report on the progress it has made in implementing the SDGs to the United Nations.

Practical measures should continuously be taken to actively assist developing countries in their sustainable development efforts by enhancing the roles of United Nations and other organizations within its system in economic and social areas. It is vital for all States Members of the United Nations to create a peaceful environment in which to fulfil the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs.

From that standpoint, my delegation extends its full support and solidarity to the Government and the people of Syria in their strenuous efforts to regain the Syrian Golan occupied by Israel, defend their national sovereignty against the destructive and subversive

plots of hostile forces and achieve territorial integrity. We categorically reject the application of the Helms-Burton Act and the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed by hostile forces against Cuba and unreservedly support the efforts of the Cuban people to vigorously push forward with the building of their economy and national defence system. We also support the dynamic external activities of the Communist Party of Cuba and the Government of Cuba towards the expansion and development of their foreign relations. In the same vein, we extend our unwavering support and solidarity to the struggle of the Government and people of Venezuela to safeguard their sovereignty.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its heartfelt gratitude to the delegations of the many countries that have extended unflinching support and encouragement to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and consistently accorded attention to the peace and development of the Korean peninsula. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will develop and strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation with all countries of the world that have a friendly attitude in their respect for our sovereignty. We will work hand in hand with all peace-loving forces of the world to establish a regime of lasting peace on the Korean peninsula.

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Hamdullah Mohib, Chair of the Delegation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Mohib** (Afghanistan): It is an honour for me to and stand at this prestigious rostrum today to represent my fellow countrywomen and men and address distinguished colleagues and partners in the General Assembly.

I am even more proud today because just two days ago, approximately 3 million Afghans, facing the threat of terrorism, risked their lives to vote in our young democracy's fourth presidential election. Those who voted included men and women, the very elderly, some voting for perhaps the last time, and the very young, those voting for the very first of many times, as well as those living with a disability, for whom the journey was longer and more tiresome, and some who came out despite having had their fingers cut off by the Taliban during previous votes. We all voted not just for a president, but also for democracy. We voted for our Constitution. We voted for freedom and sovereignty. We voted for prosperity and connectivity.

We voted for peace. We voted for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. I congratulate my fellow Afghans on exercising their right to vote.

I also wholeheartedly thank the brave and professional Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) for protecting that right. Some 70,000 of our brave soldiers protected citizens during this historic event. Because of their professionalism, most attacks — and all attacks that were intended to inflict mass casualties on civilians — were averted.

I also congratulate and thank my fellow citizens of the world. The international community, particularly the member countries of NATO, has stood by us over the past two decades. As we recovered from war, we rebuilt and reimagined a new Afghanistan — a new Afghanistan based on Islamic values, Afghan traditions and hope for a permanent escape from our bloody past. Members of the international community has invested heavily and dearly in our vision for an Afghan democracy, even with the lives of their own countrymen and women, from the time when it was only an idea, to today, when we can witness that those investments have been turned into policies, actions, institutions, principles and people. We, the young Afghan leaders of today, have embraced democratic values and principles, the same principles on which the United Nations itself was founded.

I congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. and we support the broad range of goals you are pursuing in the agenda of the General Assembly — advancing peace and security, enhancing equal education, eradicating poverty and addressing climate change. We also commend the efforts and leadership of the outgoing President of the General Assembly, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés.

Two years ago, His Excellency President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani stood on this platform at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly and spoke of the uncertainty that challenged the global community with questions that we must confront together to find solutions (see A/72/PV.6). Since then, Afghans have created a bit more certainty in our corner of the world. We Afghans have confirmed our commitment to democracy and peace. The ANDSF has proven itself to be a solid and professional institution able to protect our democratic process, and the international community

has taken a firm stand in solidarity with the Afghan people and their Government.

But uncertainty still lies with those who stand in the way of peace. To the Taliban and their foreign sponsors, I would transmit this message from the Afghan people: join us in peace, or we will continue to fight. As my colleague Ambassador Adela Raz said at the United Nations last week, this is a fight we can win.

Today, I represent my people not only because it is my duty to do so but because I, like the vast majority — about 60 per cent — of my fellow citizens, have spent three and half decades of our lives in war. My colleagues, Ambassador Adela Raz and Ambassador Roya Rahmani, the latter of whom represents us in Washington, are also part of this generation born and raised in war. We are the new Afghanistan.

Increasingly, Afghanistan is now more than ever a country driven and defined by the expectations of its youth. The opportunities afforded to us through the gains of the past 20 years have allowed us to change hope into something much more powerful: belief. We believe in our ability to bring about the peace that we have hoped for all of our lives. We have already taken many steps, but we have a long way to go on this journey. The next step belongs to us Afghans. No matter the outcome of the presidential elections, one thing is clear — peace is and will remain the Government's priority, now further strengthened by the mandate given to us by the Afghan people.

The next step in the journey to peace will be taken by Afghans, just as the first step was. In February 2018, President Ashraf Ghani extended an unconditional offer of peace to the Taliban, one that still stands today. In June 2018, the unthinkable happened — a nationwide three-day ceasefire over the Eid holidays. Those days gave Afghans tremendous belief that peace is possible and proved that the Government has the ability to directly negotiate peace with our enemies. In November 2018, President Ghani presented the Government's road map to peace and announced a negotiating team. As 2019 began, Afghanistan's journey towards peace continued with nationwide consultations with the Afghan people.

In this context, I would like to give credit to Afghan women, who were the first group of Afghan citizens to unite nationally around the agenda for peace. In February, 15,000 women were consulted from all 34 provinces on what would be acceptable to them in a

peace agreement, and 3,000 of them came together in Kabul to endorse that agenda.

In April, the Afghan Government organized a historic nationwide consultative jirga for peace, which laid out the people's demands for a peace agreement. Each of these has been a significant step in an ongoing Afghan-led process that is geared toward an inclusive, sustainable and dignified peace for all Afghans.

As we prepare to take the next step in this process, we are committed to the principles of inclusiveness, sustainability and dignity. The Afghan people have demanded a ceasefire to immediately stop the bloodshed. They have also demanded that talks happen among Afghans and that the Islamic Republic be preserved as the foundation of our nation State. We want not to only preserve the gains that we have made but to maintain the foundation that will allow us to further advance those gains.

Throughout the process, we have welcomed and appreciated the assistance from our international partners. This assistance has been aligned with our principles of peacebuilding and supported our Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Peace is our common objective, and terrorists are our common enemy. We must not rush the former, at the risk of empowering the latter. I would like to thank our international friends and partners that have supported our peace efforts, including the United States of America, the European Union, Germany, Norway, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Uzbekistan, among many others.

Today, Afghans fight on the front lines of global terrorism so that others can maintain peace in their homes and on their land. But peace is not a permanent state of being. Peace requires care and constant reappraisal undertaken by partners who share the same values, even as the fault lines between war and peace across the globe shift. The terrorists that Afghan soldiers are holding at bay today pose a threat to us all.

Terrorism is an idea as much as it is a form of violence. We must continue to work together to extinguish the ideologies behind terrorism, wherever they may exist. The zero-tolerance approach that has been repeatedly called for must no longer be a talking point and instead become an action point. We need more institutional cooperation. We need more decisive action within the region.

A strengthened collective security approach must take into account the wide nexus of transnational criminal activities as a whole, with a view to stemming the flow of terrorist fighters as well as their recruitment and the resources that allow them to remain lethal. Fighting terrorism is the basis of our critical partnership with the United States and our NATO partners — one to which Afghanistan remains firmly committed. I pay tribute to all those members of the military who have lost their lives, and their families, including our brave ANDSF and our partners who have fought shoulder to shoulder with us, including 2,438 soldiers from the United States and all others who have stood by us and paid the ultimate sacrifice. We Afghans will never forget their sacrifices, and we thank them for standing with us.

As the discussions at this General Assembly have shown, terrorism and conflict are only a couple of today's many threats. The detrimental effects of climate change and the global humanitarian crisis are also priorities — ones that we face on a daily basis in Afghanistan. These challenges will be tackled only by ensuring a new scale and scope of international cooperation. We need to look beyond the prism of individual interests if we are to address these challenges and meet the Sustainable Development Goals. Afghanistan has invested in the fulfilment of these goals, aligning them with our own national development agenda — the Afghanistan sustainable development goals. These goals are embedded within the Afghanistan national peace and development framework and our national priority programmes.

With a predominantly agricultural economy, Afghanistan has felt the enormous adverse effects of climate change. For our people, prolonged drought has been a matter of life and death, driving many from their homes and into severe poverty. Climate change is an issue to which we are still struggling to find long-term solutions, while simultaneously providing immediate humanitarian relief to those affected. Last week's Climate Action Summit reaffirmed the urgency with which new measures are needed in order to mitigate the effects of this threat. We will continue these important discussions in the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will take place in Chile in December.

I want to conclude with a forward-looking message centred on the promise of the United Nations. Afghanistan's journey in re-emerging from

the rubble and making steady progress is testament to the importance of international and multilateral cooperation. This year, Afghanistan celebrated the centenary of the restoration of its full sovereignty. Over the past two decades, the United Nations has helped us to build our democracy. We now stand confidently on its strong foundation, and we continue to advance toward self-reliance, prosperity and peace. The new Afghanistan continues to transform itself into a centre of cooperation, connectivity and development in our region. Afghan-led initiatives, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, are already paying economic dividends, opening new frontiers for trade and the movement of goods, people and ideas throughout South and Central Asia. We can now say that Afghan democracy is a success story that belongs not only to Afghans, but to all of us at the United Nations.

Time has witnessed our progress, but time remains a source of agony for us. Afghans agonize over the death of each of our compatriots. We lament each moment of time that takes an Afghan life in its passing. Our mission now is to bring about a peace that can end the suffering of all Afghans. Only when we have peace will each and every Afghan be able to experience the freedoms and opportunities of the democracy we have sacrificed so much to build. And no Afghan will truly be able to live in peace and freedom until the day when every single Afghan lives in peace and freedom. That is the day we live and work for — the day we know we will achieve in solidarity with our international friends and partners. It is the day that we no longer hope for, but that we believe in.

**The President:** I now call on Mr. Kokou Kpayedo, Chair of the Delegation of the Togolese Republic.

**Mr. Kpayedo (Togo)** (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. While assuring you, Sir, of my country's full support, I wish you every success in implementing the priorities of your mandate. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank your predecessor, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for her excellent work and the progress achieved by our Organization during her term in office. On behalf of the Togolese people, I would also like to reiterate my deep gratitude to Secretary-General António Guterres for his unwavering commitment to peace and security in a world facing multifaceted forms of upheaval.



Multilateralism and the pooling of efforts and experiences are appearing today no longer as mere options available to the community of States but rather as imperatives indispensable to the attainment of our objectives. Today, our Organization's responsibilities are growing in number, and its multidimensional challenges are becoming more complex. In order to ensure more effective action, we must get used to the idea that there is no alternative to collective action and solidarity. Evidently, the scale and acuteness of these new challenges — which are fuelled and perpetuated by wars, sociopolitical crises, poverty, exclusion, environmental degradation and the effects of climate change — call on us to wake up and implement concrete, concerted and pragmatic actions. That is why I commend the theme chosen for this session of the General Assembly — “Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion” — as it responds perfectly to our current concerns and reflects the values that underpin our full adherence to the Charter of the United Nations.

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development a number of years ago, we resolutely committed to ensuring that this programme, which remains to date the most ambitious tool we have to advance the well-being of our peoples, does not become merely another programme. In this regard, I wish to reiterate Togo's full support for all initiatives and mechanisms aimed at implementing various strategic plans in pursuit of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Government of Togo has made enormous efforts at the national level to reduce poverty and ensure that no one is left behind by 2030. With this in mind, and in accordance with the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and Vision 2020 of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), my country adopted a national development plan for the period 2018-2022, in line with the country's emerging agenda. The plan is a five-year strategic document based on the fundamentals of economic, social and environmental development.

Through the plan's three strategic focuses, Togo aspires to become a stable and economically, socially and democratically sound middle-income country that espouses solidarity and is open to the world. This is already reflected in efforts to establish a strategic hub of excellence and a first-class business centre in the West African subregion and to develop centres to transform

agriculture, manufacturing and the extractive industry while strengthening social development and inclusion mechanisms. In short, the plan, whose flagship project is based on rational choices that integrate all 17 SDGs, is designed to make structural transformations to the Togolese economy with the aim of ensuring strong, sustainable, resilient and inclusive growth that creates decent jobs for all and leads to improved individual well-being.

Therefore, in addition to the accelerated building of road, port, airport and agricultural infrastructure, my country is determinedly pursuing its 2008 education policy to introduce free primary education, the implementation of an expanded school meals programme and the introduction of health insurance called *School Assur* for 2 million students. The policy has encouraged greater enrolment, especially among girls. Through the Government education strategy for the period 2014-2025, Togo aims to achieve universal primary education by 2022 and to expand preschool services in rural and poor areas. The ultimate objective is to meet the standards of quality education and significantly reduce the illiteracy.

When we adopted the SDGs in 2015, we knew full well that the fulfilment of our development commitments would depend on the international community's ability to mobilize the necessary financing. Accordingly, it is vital to further promote international cooperation and solidarity in order to establish innovative partnerships that will bring progress at the international level. We therefore welcome the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which remains a key framework for mobilizing financial resources likely to lead to tangible progress in achieving the SDGs. It is therefore urgent to make a definitive commitment to the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and to make the most of the relevant mechanisms it offers. In this regard, particular attention should be paid to the least developed countries and to all vulnerable countries at the margins of world trade. We should seize multilateralism as an opportunity for vibrant international economic and trade cooperation that brings hope to the human community we are building.

I would like to welcome the continuous integration efforts made within the framework of the African Union (AU) and the continent's regional communities since the adoption of Agenda 2063 of the African Union, whose goal is the structural transformation

in Africa. In this regard, my country welcomes the AU's launch, on 30 May, in Niamey, of the African Continental Free Trade Area, one of the 14 flagship projects of Agenda 2063, which is intended to accelerate the industrialization of Africa, increase intra-African trade and build quality infrastructure. Similarly, the Single African Air Transport Market was established in response to the urgent need to unify the African domestic air-transport market. The Market, of which Togo is the coordinator, will stimulate huge cross-border investment opportunities in the aviation and tourism industries and provides an excellent opportunity to improve connectivity among AU member States. At the subregional level, the adoption of the principle of a common ECOWAS currency is also to be welcomed as an important factor in accelerating integration.

In addition to improving the legal framework to promote good governance and access to health, education and well-being, the issue of climate change and environmental protection is a major concern for my country. It is the entire international community's responsibility to demonstrate how closely the issue of climate change is linked to food and health security, poverty reduction, economic growth and human development. We therefore believe that it is appropriate to guarantee funds to help the most vulnerable countries preserve biodiversity. That is why it is crucial for the international community to find appropriate solutions to issues related to climate change.

At this juncture, my country reiterates its support and commitment to the Paris Agreement. Accordingly, the holding of the Climate Action Summit, which took place in the run-up to the general debate, is to be welcomed. We hope that the promises made at the Summit will lead to a reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions by 2030 and their total neutralization by 2050. My country stresses the need to better endow the Green Climate Fund so that it can better assist less polluting States that are more exposed to climate change in finding the appropriate means to deal with it.

Our world today is in an extremely volatile security context. The persistence of hotbeds of tension, particularly in Africa, the Middle East and the Near East, such emerging issues as terrorism, violent extremism, natural disasters and climate change, and the trends towards nuclear proliferation threaten international peace and security, without which our development efforts cannot prosper. That is why, my country, which is committed to the values of peace and

peaceful coexistence, considers that we have everything to gain by acting in a concerted manner and with strong determination to end all these crises.

The year 2019 has been a particularly scary year for several countries marked by an existential fear of terrorist threats. Recurring attacks around the world prove to us on a daily basis that this rampant evil remains omnipresent, forcing us to be constantly and increasingly vigilant. The West African region has not been spared. Indeed, there have been several attacks in Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Benin and so on. Because of its proximity to neighbouring countries hard hit by the scourge of terrorism, Togo is well aware of the magnitude of the threat and remains on high alert in the face of this asymmetrical threat. Togo is currently taking a preventive and proactive approach to the terrorist threat and has therefore sought the expertise of the Office of Counter-Terrorism to help it assess the risks posed by violent extremism. The Office's visit, which took place in Lomé from 22 to 24 July, made it possible to make recommendations and assess the priority needs in terms of technical assistance. I take this opportunity to thank the United Nations for its highly appreciated support.

My country remains convinced that the spread of the scourge of terrorism requires enhanced international cooperation as its complexity precludes an individual approach by States and demands a synergistic action through a shared vision. Aware of the need for cooperation at the regional level, the Togolese Government supports the Accra initiative, taken jointly with Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and the Niger in September 2017, whose objective is precisely to unify and harmonize approaches to the terrorist threat.

To that end, it is vital that sustainable financing be found for the Group of Five for the Sahel, which constitutes an exemplary framework for cooperation in the fight against terrorism in the West African subregion. The delay in the operationalization of its joint force is highly detrimental to peace and security in Africa. In this regard, we join in the many calls for international mobilization to enable the force to act and contribute to eradicating this tentacular evil that preys on our countries. That is why my country welcomes the reform of the United Nations peace and security pillar and strongly supports the actions initiated by the Secretary-General to increase the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations through more

specific mandates and collaboration with regional and subregional organizations.

However, it is not unreasonable to question the diminishing financial resources allocated to these operations as the challenges of peacekeeping and consolidation become more complex. As a major troop contributor to peacekeeping operations, Togo reiterates its commitment to serve wherever peace is threatened. We fully support both the zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse in theatres of peacekeeping operations and the Kigali Principles.

It cannot be stressed enough that nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction continue to pose serious threats to international peace and security. My country, whose foreign policy prioritizes general and complete disarmament, has always advocated the use of nuclear energy exclusively for civilian purposes. It is in this spirit that, on 7 August, the Togolese Government adopted a bill on the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear energy, cognizant of its positive applications, particularly in the fields of health, agriculture, industry and ionizing radiation, and so on.

International migratory flows are intensifying and diversifying and today constitute another major challenge to be addressed. As a result of growing economic inequality, more men and women are leaving their countries of origin in search of a safer or better life and opportunities in other places. The migratory phenomenon too often results in tragedy and is a source of sorrow for people and Governments alike. It poses enormous challenges to the international community, which must find mechanisms for collective management and more effective cooperation among States. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly on 19 December 2018 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which emerged from the intergovernmental conference held in Marrakech on 10 and 11 December 2018. This historic Compact, while non-legally binding, serves as a useful road map for the more effective management of this great crisis of our time.

Our community of shared destiny compels us to overcome any temptation to resort to isolated and solitary actions. If our goal is to effectively fight against poverty and all the other ills afflicting humankind in order to build fairer and more inclusive societies, we must devote our efforts to strengthening multilateral mechanisms, while taking daily inspiration from the

African proverb: “Alone we go faster, but together we go further”.

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Marc-André Blanchard, Chair of the Delegation of Canada.

**Mr. Blanchard (Canada):** It is my honour and privilege to address the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. The breadth and depth of the deliberations held over the past week has reminded us of the unique importance of the General Assembly. No other platform affords the full expression of such a diversity of voices and views. No other venue brings the world together like this.

The challenges we face today are systemic and global. They know no national boundaries. No single State, no matter how big or how strong, can succeed by acting in isolation or even bilaterally. Moreover, it is also now clear to most people that Governments acting alone cannot deliver the benefits of multilateralism themselves. Public policies and public resources, although absolutely essential, are insufficient to tackle challenges like climate change and inequality or to fully achieve sustainable development.

In order to deliver results to people everywhere, multilateralism must be more inclusive and innovative than ever. We must break out of our silos. Strengthening multilateralism means involving all stakeholders. Governments should indeed lead, but the ideas and participation of youth, women, indigenous peoples, entrepreneurs and other members of civil society are critical in fostering the kind of innovation we need to succeed as a global community. This is not simply because our challenges are common, but rather because the potential solutions and gains are all collective. To realize them, we need to work together.

What took place at the United Nations last week brings hope. It was all about diversifying the voices around the United Nations and about fostering innovative partnerships. This high-level week began with youth from all over the world sounding the alarm over climate change and demanding urgent action, leadership and accountability. We heard young people from Tuvalu, Kiribati, Marshall Islands and places across the Pacific describe living in constant fear, not knowing whether their homelands will still be capable of supporting human life by 2030. These young men and women travelled thousands of kilometres with a simple message: “Save the Pacific, save the world”. I

want them to know that Canada has heard their message. The message echoed loudly in Montreal and throughout Canada on Friday when hundreds of thousands of young people went on strike and marched in the streets during the largest protest of its kind ever held in our country.

At the Climate Action Summit, we heard that the power to change course lies in our hands. Readily available solutions exist here and now, which, if pursued, could eliminate 70 per cent of global emissions.

During the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, we heard loud and clear that all our efforts must be channelled towards fulfilling our shared objectives of people, planet and prosperity for a world that leaves no one behind. At the Small island developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway mid-term review, we were reminded of the special vulnerabilities of small island developing States and how they are at great risk. At the high-level meeting on universal health coverage, we heard about the powerful impact that health care can have on prosperity, not just for individuals but for entire nations. A lack of coverage keeps people in poverty and away from achieving their economic potential.

Canada was proud to co-facilitate the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, together with our close partner, Ghana. Through this process, we learned how the poorest and most vulnerable countries are confronting unsustainable levels of debt, and we learned how the decline in correspondent banking relationships poses an existential threat to the nations of the Caribbean and the Pacific. We learned how the scourge of illicit financial flows continues to rob developing countries of the financial resources they need to invest in their peoples' future. But we also learned that the world has more than enough financial resources to make the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a reality. The problems are coordination and connection. We need urgently to address the discrepancy between where the financial resources are and where they are needed most.

Solving this mismatch must be a collective priority, here at the United Nations and at home. Doing so is the key to achieving all of what we have set out to accomplish this week — from climate action and universal health care to the vision of the inclusive, people-centred sustainable prosperity that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to establish. Together with Jamaica, Canada founded the Group of

Friends of SDG Financing because we are committed to finding ways to mobilize the necessary resources from the public, private and philanthropic sectors in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

That is why Canada and Jamaica teamed up with Denmark, the United Nations Development Programme and the University of Maryland to launch the Closing the Investment Gap Initiative, which is focusing on helping developing countries to build sustainable infrastructure faster. It is working: nine developing-country investment teams have brought forward 13 high-priority, sustainable infrastructure projects representing an aggregate capital investment of approximately \$4.3 billion.

Indeed, Canada has been working vigorously with partners to generate momentum for financing sustainable development, and we are starting to see the result. New actors are entering the space, including banks and impact investors that are increasingly willing to work with public financing and philanthropists.

As the general debate at this session draws to a close, Canada continues to reflect on all that we have heard over the course of the past week. We want our fellow Member States and the global citizens who journeyed here to know that we listened and that we heard them. We listened to President Macky Sall of Senegal say that Africa does not need tutoring; Africa needs partnerships (see A/74/PV.4). We hear him, and we agree.

We listened to President Taneti Maamau of Kiribati say that the real measure of the United Nations is not the number of resolutions, but how many disadvantaged people are better off as a result (see A/74/PV.6). That is the reason we gather here. We hear him, and we agree.

We listened to Prime Minister Joseph Muscat of Malta say that women's roles in society have been underestimated, underacknowledged and at times even unrecognized (see A/74/PV.8). We hear him, and we agree.

We listened to you, Mr. President, when you said that evidence abounds that we can do great things if we are courageous, steadfast and show empathy (see A/74/PV.3). We hear you, and we agree.

We listened when our Secretary-General reminded us that we are here to serve. We heard him call on each of us to restore trust, rebuild hope and move ahead together (*ibid.*). We hear him, and we agree. We are all



here to serve our citizens and the planet and to move ahead, together — united as nations and as partners. A strong United Nations is to everyone's advantage, as is an effective Security Council capable of adapting and responding to twenty-first century challenges. Canada wants to do its part in support of this goal.

Nowhere is the need more urgent than in those places where fragility and violence directly affect millions of people. The General Assembly knows very well where political solutions are desperately needed to stop mass atrocities and to bring durable solutions to protracted crises so generations of people can return, in safety and dignity, to their homes, so they can have hope and prosper and thrive.

People in Syria, Yemen, Venezuela and countless other places rightly look to the blue-and-white flag of the United Nations with hope, but, too often, also with frustration and even anger. We have a responsibility to serve them. We need to do more to help. All hope, however, is not lost. We should acknowledge with admiration and respect that the United Nations can act, and is acting, as a force for peace in many parts of the world.

The high-level events convened last week by the Governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, Somalia and the Sudan demonstrate a genuine desire for partnership in support of peace. It is in the interest of the Organization and its Member States to respond to their legitimate expectations. We should accompany them in their pursuit of sustainable peace and prosperity for their peoples.

Canada is prepared to do its part. We want to help develop forward-looking approaches to the world's toughest problems. We want to bring our uniquely diverse experience to bear in support of truly global solutions while fully respecting local leadership. We hope to contribute to a new multilateralism where benefits are distributed more broadly, more evenly and more fairly; where commitments are fulfilled; and where implementation is achieved and the results experienced by the people. We intend to do this by earning a seat on a Security Council that truly serves the interests of all Member States.

Should members choose to elect us, Canada can be counted on to do what it has always done: ask the tough questions, actively listen to the answers, stand up for what matters, be clear and consistent, and unite rather than divide. We are fully committed to bringing

innovative ideas to prevent and respond to crises, and we firmly believe in the power of multilateral solutions and partnership to address the most intractable of global challenges.

As a member of the Security Council, we will focus on five priority areas.

The first is to sustain peace, together. We support the Secretary-General's vision in this regard — full stop. Prevention and peacebuilding are essential components of an effective approach. A Canadian, former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, was at the heart of the creation of the first United Nations peacekeeping force, more than 60 years ago. Since then, more than 125,000 Canadians have served abroad in support of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

We are the longstanding chair of the Working Group of the Whole of the United Nations Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, bringing troop- and police-contributing countries, financial donors and host States together to improve the vital collective endeavour that is twenty-first-century United Nations peacekeeping. We will continue to drive innovation in this space, just as we did with smart pledges and the Vancouver Principles.

We have served as a member of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and Chair of the Sierra Leone configuration for more than a decade. Our ongoing support in this capacity for Sierra Leone's nationally led recovery and development has contributed to sustainable peace in that country.

We are proud of our record, but we have also drawn inspiration from the work of many, many others. We are grateful for Jordan's prescient efforts in 2015 to establish a new, and necessary, agenda on youth, peace and security. We support Equatorial Guinea in drawing the Security Council's attention to the African Union's critically important Silencing the Guns initiative. We pay tribute to Kuwait for successfully bringing forward the first-ever Security Council resolution on missing persons in armed conflict, and to Poland for having expanded the Council's protection-of-civilians agenda — which Canada spearheaded 20 years ago — to also include persons with disabilities in conflict. These action-oriented initiatives demonstrate what can be accomplished by elected members of the Security Council working together.

Canada's second priority is to address climate change, together.

Climate change is the defining issue of our time, an existential threat like no other. It is an environmental issue, an economic issue and, as it endangers the lives and livelihoods of citizens around the world, one of the greatest security challenges of the twenty-first century.

For that reason, we listened carefully to the views expressed during the open debate organized by the Dominican Republic under its recent presidency of the Security Council on addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security (see S/PV.8451). Like most Member States, we, too, are convinced that climate change is a risk amplifier for security. It is a cause of conflict and unrest, and as it worsens, it will leave millions of people displaced, hungry and vulnerable to disease and weather-induced disaster. The Security Council needs to lead the rest of the world in recognizing the urgency and necessity of acting.

As a country bordering on three oceans, affected by climate change and with a longstanding tradition of contributing to solutions to non-traditional security challenges, Canada brings much to the table. We hope to harness the energy, partnerships and results generated by the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference we co-hosted with Kenya and Japan in support of this goal as well.

Thirdly, Canada will use its seat on the Security Council to promote economic security, together. Investing in people and in countries to foster prosperity and equal opportunity is essential for maintaining international peace and security. Haiti is a striking example. A few months ago, I led a delegation of States Members on the Economic and Social Council Ad Hoc Advisory Group's annual visit to Haiti. We heard compelling and irrefutable evidence that exclusion and economic inequalities are the root causes of Haiti's political instability and deteriorating security situation. There can be no peace and security in Haiti when 25 per cent of the population is hungry. We shared what we learned with the Secretary-General and members of the Security Council and called on them to take the economic dimensions of Haiti's ongoing transition into greater consideration in the evolving United Nations approach. It was the right thing to do and the new special political mission will be better for it.

The situation in the Sahel is another striking example. Young people have too few opportunities, which in turn makes them more susceptible to extremism and to criminal and terrorist networks. As most conflicts are deeply rooted in the lack of economic opportunities, focusing on the prevention and peacebuilding agenda means looking through an economic-security lens. As a member of the Security Council, Canada will call attention to the vital links between sustainable and inclusive economic growth, job creation, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and security. We will continue to break down the silos between security and development, between Governments and the private sector, between North and South, between traditional and non-traditional partners and between United Nations organs like the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, so that they can work better together, for all people.

*(spoke in French)*

Canada's fourth priority is to promote gender equality together. Despite important gains, gender inequality is still widespread. Impunity, including for sexual and gender-based violence, remains a common and unacceptable feature of conflict. We know that achieving sustainable peace will only be possible through women's meaningful participation in United Nations peace operations, peace processes and peacebuilding. But progress on this front has been too slow. Canada has decided to take action, along with other donors and UN-Women, to create the Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations. This new fund supports partners to substantially increase the representation of women overall and in positions of authority.

As we prepare to mark the twentieth anniversary of the landmark resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, which my country closely supported while we were last on the Security Council, Canada is aligning all of its peace and security, humanitarian and development policies and programmes to truly turn a corner in relation to gender equality. We are heartened to see so many other countries also trying to make positive changes in this regard.

Canada is proud to have a feminist foreign policy. It means we will always speak up for women's rights, everywhere in the world, even when speaking up is difficult, and we will back up our words with action. From the Elsie Initiative to working with Group of

Seven partners to secure a \$3.8 billion investment for the education of women and girls in fragile or conflict-affected countries to naming Canada's first ambassador-level position for women, peace and security and introducing a feminist international-assistance policy that brings a gender lens to almost all of Canada's international development work, we believe that the economic and political empowerment of women and girls is critical to building a safer, more prosperous and inclusive world.

Finally, as a member of the Security Council, Canada will work with its partners to strengthen multilateralism. Over the course of almost 75 years, multilateralism has delivered impressive gains. The system of treaties, laws, norms and cooperative arrangements that have been developed to guide global affairs has prevented wars and improved lives and livelihoods. But we also know that the rules have not been evenly applied, nor have their benefits been evenly distributed. Implementing commitments remains a perennial challenge, as does translating decisions into tangible progress for people on the ground.

More than 70 years after their establishment, our multilateral institutions need to adapt so that they can serve all countries. Our approaches also must reflect the new realities of the world we live in. With a population of 36 million people, Canada needs and understands the importance of the rules-based international system — one in which might is not always right and in which more powerful countries have to treat smaller ones in accordance with standards that are internationally respected, enforced and upheld. That is why we are working to reform them and make them fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

Canada has always been a responsible global actor and strong humanitarian donor. We see the potential for positive change, at home and abroad, and are committed to working hard with others to attain it. We seek genuine partnerships with other States, the private sector and all parts of civil society, including faith leaders, academics, activists and youth. Several former Canadian Prime Ministers and special envoys from different political parties came to New York last week, together with many Canadian business leaders and investment executives. Our diverse, high-level, joint public and private sector delegation sat down with over 100 Member States and, in so doing, identified new opportunities in relation to trade and financing for development.

Canada's multilateral engagement will continue to be characterized by a capacity to take advantage of diversity. Canadian identity is based on the fundamental principle that our differences are an asset, not an obstacle. We are home to people from over 200 ethnic origins, including many indigenous peoples with distinct and vibrant cultures. Over 200 languages from every corner of the world are spoken in Canada.

For that reason, we feel very much at home at the United Nations. Our country boasts a similar degree of diversity: nearly 50 per cent of the people living in Toronto, our biggest city and home to my family, were born outside Canada. The same is true of Vancouver. We treat others as friends, with respect. We believe in helping everyone to realize their full potential. But like all States, we remain a work in progress. As noted in Canada's national statement to the Assembly two years ago (see A/72/PV.12), we have much work to do to advance the rights of indigenous peoples in Canada. The path to reconciliation is hard and will take time, but we are fully committed to it.

Although our record is far from perfect, we acknowledge our faults with humility and will strive to improve, including by listening to every one of us here today and learning from their experiences. We do so because we see our future as intertwined with that of the world as a whole. Canadians value the spirit of community. We bring people together and we understand that opportunities lie in the connections we share with others. We bring this hopeful energy to the United Nations — it is simply who we are.

We can be counted upon to keep listening to the diversity of views around the table. We can be counted upon to always make room at the table for others, irrespective of their size or stature. A voice is a voice; all should be heard. Canada is here to serve and to move ahead together — united as nations and as partners. That is the kind of Security Council member Canada would be: inclusive, innovative, open, honest and reliable, working together with all Member States for all Member States. We hope to earn the support of the Assembly to apply these principles.

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jean-Claude Félix do Rego, Chair of the Delegation of the Republic of Benin.

**Mr. Do Rego (Benin)** (*spoke in French*): Mr. Patrice Athanase Guillaume Talon, President of the Republic, Head of State and Head of Government of the Republic

of Benin, who was unable to travel to New York, has instructed me to deliver the following message on his behalf and on behalf of the Government:

“It is with particular pride that I would like, on behalf of the Beninese delegation and on my own behalf, to reiterate my warm congratulations to Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on his successful election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session and to assure him of Benin’s full support for the success of his mandate.

“I also congratulate his predecessor, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for the excellence of her work during her term of office, and reiterate my vision of success to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, whose courageous reforms I welcome and support.

“The General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session is taking place at a time when the fundamental principles of multilateralism are increasingly being questioned, and when serious climate, security and social challenges need to be addressed, which is a major challenge for the Organization that we created almost 75 years ago. The theme of this session invites us to galvanize multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion, which is a theme that summarizes the objectives we have set for ourselves for the next 12 months as part of our joint actions.

“Those challenges require us to strengthen multilateralism — a multilateralism that is seen as the expression of exchange between peoples and the equality of all. It is a necessity more than a projection into the future. If all our States retreat behind their national borders, if we sacrifice our collective values and if we perpetuate the current tragedies, we will certainly move away from these objectives. Indeed, it is multilateralism that will make it possible to build lasting peace and to meet each of these challenges.

“As we enter the fifth year of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the current session of the General Assembly is of particular importance for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The high-level events held — namely, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, the high-

level meeting on universal health coverage, as well as the high-level meeting to review progress made on the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway — were opportunities for exchange and engagement. These forums, in which we discussed efforts and future actions to accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, should enable us to end all forms of poverty and to fight inequalities, while ensuring that no one is left behind. The Secretary-General encouraged us to approach our meeting on climate change on the basis of concrete engagement for future actions rather than negotiation and discussion.

“My Government is convinced of the seriousness of the current situation and has therefore developed and submitted an ambitious plan to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions by 2030. Accordingly, in all energy and agriculture sectors, Benin plans to contribute to reducing cumulative greenhouse-gas emissions by 16.17 per cent between 2021 and 2030 by increasing our renewable-energy production capacity and through sustainable agricultural. Over the same period, we will increase the protection of natural forests with a focus on reducing the annual deforestation rate by 20,000 hectares and by creating 10,000 hectares of forest plantations.

“I take this opportunity to reaffirm from this rostrum my country’s commitment to continuing to work towards sustainable development in order to achieve social inclusion and the reduction of inequalities, in particular by encouraging effective political impact through the strengthening of dialogue on social development issues, which will ensure the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

“I would like to recall that my country stands firm on the principles and values enshrined in the Charter and the fundamental principles of international law. My country deeply believes in international solidarity and common efforts aimed at ensuring the well-being of all peoples. I renew my country’s support for efforts to achieve a two-State solution guaranteeing a viable Palestinian State with the attributes of full international sovereignty, living side by side and in perfect harmony with the State of Israel. Benin also regrets the continued economic, commercial and financial



blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States of America and would like to call for the promotion of constructive dialogue so that these two countries can achieve a definitive normalization of their bilateral relations for the well-being and prosperity of their peoples.

“The late former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said,

‘If every ethnic, religious or linguistic group claimed statehood, there would be no limit to fragmentation, and peace, security and economic well-being for all would become ever more difficult to achieve’ (A/47/277, para. 17).

“Peace and security in the Sahel are of crucial importance for the stability of our region. At the special summit of the Economic Community of West African States focused on the fight against terrorism, held on 14 September, we reaffirmed our commitment to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries against all separatist tendencies.

“I would like to join my peers in the subregion and welcome the fact that the advocacy of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) before the Security Council has been favourably received, in the form of the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Despite my country’s limited capacities and resources, Benin has always been involved in international initiatives aimed at preventing crises and maintaining peace. My country’s continued contribution of troops to MINUSMA illustrates this commitment.

“Once again, I would like to express the solidarity of my Government and the people of Benin with the countries of the G-5 Sahel and with neighbouring Nigeria, which are all gravely affected by terrorism. However, our countries have not failed to continue to focus on the well-being of our respective peoples through the implementation of the sustainable development programme by 2030, despite this regional security challenge.

“The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the launch of its implementation were an important step in the process of promoting the development of our States and the well-being of peoples. Accelerating its

implementation has been a major imperative for my Government, which seeks to find innovative mechanisms for access to resources to ensure its financing. In the four years since its launch in Benin, one of the key lessons that has emerged is that integrating SDG initiatives into national planning frameworks is essential for the 2030 Agenda to be effectively implemented. This effort must pay particular attention to harmonizing the principles of prioritization, coordination and partnership.

“After contextualizing and selecting the SDGs, my Government organized its interventions around three focus areas, namely, sustainable food security policies, resilient production policies and inclusive policies, which generate positive synergies. In relation to each of these critical entry points, we have implemented specific actions leading to cross-cutting progress.

“In this framework, in order to guarantee quality education for children, we have set up the Integrated National School Feeding Programme, which not only improves the school performance, health and nutritional status of students but also develops local agricultural production, thereby providing substantial income to farmers. These concerted actions have also reduced the prevalence of food insecurity, which fell by 1.4 per cent over the period 2013-2017. By promoting the development of sustainable food systems and healthy lifestyles, this critical entry point into education creates positive synergies by reducing hunger, promoting good health and well-being, and fostering effective partnerships.

“With a view to achieving more such results, strengthening the resilience of production systems was chosen as the second critical entry point. It has found expression in, among other specific actions, sustainable land management and the roll-out of initiatives to protect and rehabilitate depleted lands with the aim of improving food security. These climate-change adaptation measures have led to more than 13,000 farmers being trained in sustainable land management, over 92 per cent of whom have adopted sustainable practices. In this context, the Government of my country is considering establishing an international research centre on climate-change-resilient agriculture. By strengthening the resilience of production systems, soil protection and rehabilitation help with

climate-change adaptation and lead to increased productivity and employment and reduced hunger and poverty, thereby resulting in significant positive synergies for fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

“In order to leave no one behind, Benin has set up, under the third critical entry point, a human-capital development insurance scheme for the most vulnerable in the agricultural, trade, transport, crafts, art and culture sectors. By providing health insurance, training, credit and pension insurance to 22 per cent of those without health coverage and 18 per cent of the extremely poor population, this specific measure contributes in a tangible way to poverty eradication, social protection, learning and access to decent employment. Once the pilot phase has ended, implementation at national level should complement other specific social protection measures with cross-cutting impacts on the attainment of the SDGs.

“Also under the third critical entry point, also with the aim of improving the living conditions of our population, my Government has invested massively in the area of drinking water in order to fulfil SDG 6 by 2021. In addition, it has halved energy dependence by setting up new 127-megawatt power-generation capacity, with the objective of reaching 400 megawatts by 2021 and a 25 per cent renewable energy mix.

“Taking into account the assessment that quality-control institutions should play a role in the regulatory and anti-corruption fields, and especially a prominent role in improving the effectiveness of public spending, Benin has embarked on a vast programme of reforms in the area of economic governance. The efficiency gains resulting from the implementation of the reforms, which target the administration, the judiciary and the party-based political system, will strengthen the effectiveness of public policy.

“Among emerging trends that may present opportunities for the medium-term financing of the development programme until 2030, my Government advocates the consolidation of public finances through investment and capital expenditures, the curbing of illicit financial flows and the return of foreign assets. For this reason, combating impunity and corruption is at the heart of our priority actions. In order to optimize the

State’s resources, we have, more specifically, set up enforcement agencies that play a key role in ensuring that actions are carried out with greater efficiency. Similarly, it is very important to strengthen oversight bodies in the public expenditure chain. Such measures are necessary to ensure that financial resources are actually used for their intended purposes. They also aim to make national actors more virtuous and to guarantee the quality of public spending.

“In summary, Benin has generally undertaken important actions to accelerate progress. They include improving access to transport infrastructure and electricity, with the introduction of new capacity that brings us closer to autonomy, cleaning up the country’s main cities, enhancing young people’s access to decent work and empowering women.

“On the political front, we have undertaken major reforms of the party and electoral systems. For example, a new political party charter and electoral code were adopted in July and September 2018, with almost unanimous support from members of parliament of all persuasions, are the result of a process initiated at the beginning of the seventh legislature in 2015. The reforms’ overriding challenge is to address the fragmentation of political parties, avoid the instability inherent in majority Governments built on alliances and create the conditions for every political party to actually play its role and implement its programme in a coherent manner and in accordance with its development vision. The new electoral code and the political party charter served as the basis for the organization of the parliamentary elections in April. This democratic electoral process, despite the disputes inherent in all reforms, was led serenely by the Autonomous National Electoral Commission and resulted in the election of the members of the eighth legislature, which was formally sworn in on 16 April.

“In conclusion, 30 years after making a historic commitment to children around the world by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have the opportunity today to reaffirm this commitment and ensure that every child enjoys all of his or her rights. My delegation is pleased to have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which

establishes a communications procedure that was adopted in New York on 19 December 2011.

“Furthermore, my country remains convinced that ever closer cooperation between States and the harmonious functioning of international organizations whose main function is to guarantee the common interest and collective security must remain our absolute priority of the day. That is for us the key issue at the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, which seeks to galvanize multilateralism, the only guarantee of success in the process of resolving our global challenges in the area of climate change, the fight against poverty and efforts to develop quality education. I wish this session every success.”

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ravinatha Aryasinha, Chair of the Delegation of Sri Lanka.

**Mr. Aryasinha (Sri Lanka):** It is indeed an honour to participate in the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, representing Sri Lanka. I bring greetings from His Excellency President Maithripala Sirisena, President of Sri Lanka, who regrets very much his inability to have attended this session.

Permit me to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session. Undoubtedly your longstanding experience will guide the work of the Assembly to a successful conclusion. Let me also thank the outgoing President, Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, for having successfully conducted the work of the previous session.

I also wish to extend Sri Lanka’s appreciation to Secretary-General António Guterres for his sagacious leadership and untiring efforts in achieving the objectives of the United Nations.

The theme of this year’s general debate is both timely and significant as we strive to build a world of peace and prosperity by eradicating extreme poverty, ensuring access to quality education and striving to respond to climate change and to promote inclusion. As we complete the first cycle of reviews of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is clear that we have made substantial progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet the end of the road is a long way off, with the increasingly devastating impacts of climate

change threatening to reverse those gains and impede our path to development.

Sri Lanka reiterates its strong commitment to the climate-related global initiatives. It endorses the clear message of the Climate Action Summit, held last week in this very venue, and notes that we are on the brink of a climate emergency. It is imperative to strengthen our collective political will and accelerate global action in stalling its emergence.

Inequality-driven push factors, aggravated by climate change, have a definite negative bearing on individuals and communities, forcing them to leave their usual habitats, resulting in a mass-scale migration of people.

Having adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, a voluntary framework for governing migration in a manner that is safe, orderly, regular and responsible, it is now time for us to ensure its full implementation.

Climate change has also exacerbated the global phenomenon of poverty, undermining human dignity and remaining one of the greatest threats to the achievement of the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sri Lanka remains committed to the international efforts on poverty eradication, which has been at the heart of our development strategy for several decades now.

Quality education remains the key to social progress and economic empowerment. Sri Lanka greatly values quality education as a means of eradicating poverty and achieving progress. We have a longstanding policy of providing universal and free education at the primary and secondary levels since 1945, many decades before the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals or the SDGs. Today Sri Lanka’s literacy rate stands at 92 per cent, one of the highest in the world.

As we persevere in these efforts to reverse the negative trends, our ability to address global challenges has been compromised in recent times by the increasing threat to multilateralism. As the United Nations approaches its seventy-fifth anniversary, next year, this is an excellent opportunity to assess its successes and failures, including its engagement with Member States. The partnerships fostered between Member States and the United Nations over seven decades, based on trust and equity, must not be compromised or allowed to be hijacked by actors accountable to none and with

selective political agendas. Given the changes in the landscape of global politics, particularly the emergence of non-State actors, it is vital that the Organization, which is composed of and driven by sovereign Member States, ensure that primacy and respect be given to the decisions taken by Member States regarding essentially domestic matters.

In this context, our quest to strengthen the work of the General Assembly through its revitalization process is extremely important to ensuring that it remains relevant as the main deliberative and policy-making organ of the United Nations. Therefore, it is incumbent upon United Nations policy implementers to refrain from being misled by entities with vested interests. The United Nations must also desist from making decisions without a valid consultative process, as its work must always be Member-State-driven. Failure to ensure this will not only discredit this body and negate the values that it represents but also break the trust of Member States, jeopardizing the partnerships within the United Nations.

Sri Lanka's commitment to disarmament remains steadfast. With the increasing challenges to the global arms-control, disarmament and non-proliferation regimes, Sri Lanka continues to recognize the pivotal role of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and urges the resumption of substantive negotiations under its mandate. Decision CD/2119, adopted in February 2018 under Sri Lanka's presidency of the CD, was a modest contribution towards bridging different viewpoints, focusing on the early resumption of negotiations. We see value in the continuation of this process.

Additionally, in recent years, Sri Lanka has acceded to a number of disarmament treaties, including the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Sri Lanka has also presided over the Meetings of States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, and of States Parties to the Review Conference of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The 2020 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Review Conference will also provide an opportunity for Member States to deliver on their commitments, as the Treaty marks the fiftieth anniversary of its entry into force next year.

Sri Lanka has been contributing to United Nations peacekeeping efforts since 1960, serving in the Central African Republic, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, South Sudan, Timor and the Western Sahara, thereby demonstrating our commitment to global peace and security. We look forward to enhancing our contribution to a more secure and peaceful world, and obstacles must not be placed in the way of Sri Lanka's long-standing peacekeeping contribution to the United Nations.

Given Sri Lanka's experience of the recent past in low- and high-intensity conflicts with terrorist groups, few countries can qualitatively match the troops sent by Sri Lanka, which have extensive professional experience in all aspects of peacekeeping and providing humanitarian assistance. I take this opportunity to express gratitude for their contribution and wish to particularly salute three soldiers — Corporal M. Wijesinghe, who made the ultimate sacrifice in Haiti in 2005; and Captain H.W.D. Jayawickrama and Corporal S.S. Wijekumara, in Mali earlier this year.

Sri Lanka is also concerned about the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestine territory, including East Jerusalem, where the continuing expansion of settlements across the occupied West Bank is leading to the increased demolition of homes. While restating Sri Lanka's consistent and principled position that the Palestinian people have a legitimate and inalienable right to the natural resources in their territory and to statehood, we further recognize the legitimate and sensitive security concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. In this context, Sri Lanka reiterates the importance of the early implementation of the relevant General Assembly resolutions on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders.

There can be no development without peace. Peace is a catalyst for stability, inclusiveness and socioeconomic growth. For nearly 30 years, Sri Lanka was one of world's worst-affected countries in terms of separatist terrorism, long before the fight against terrorism became an international buzz phrase. With the defeat of terrorism in Sri Lanka in 2009, we experienced an unprecedented peace dividend for nearly a decade. However, on 21 April — Easter Sunday — this peace was shattered by a heinous terrorist attack in Sri Lanka, which took the lives of more than 250 of our citizens and foreign nationals and injured hundreds more.



The attack was an act of radical extremist terrorists who were inspired by and claimed allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. It challenged the pluralistic processes in Sri Lanka of normalization, reconciliation and development, which had been arduously rebuilt since the end of the separatist conflict. Despite the attempts of the terrorists to destroy the country's social fabric, the resilience and trust between our communities and law-enforcement authorities ensured that citizens themselves warned of impending attacks and assisted in apprehending the culprits.

The incident also reminded us that no country is immune to the bane of radicalization, extremism and terrorism. It has reaffirmed our resolve to fight these global menaces and urge all countries to work in collaboration to address their root causes. We especially thank the Secretary-General and our friends in the international community who unreservedly condemned the Easter Sunday attacks and supported the Government of Sri Lanka in numerous ways.

The events surrounding the Easter Sunday bombing also taught us that fighting terrorism must go hand in hand with protecting human rights. One cannot be compromised for the sake of the other. This very delicate balance has often been elusive, with States veering towards one extreme or the other, applying double standards to similar situations and often politicizing these issues. We as a nation have found ourselves up to the task of overcoming the challenges posed by the violent extremism of Easter Sunday. The citizenry was secured within a relatively short period of time, and law and order restored. Our institutions asserted themselves, each in its respective role, to ensure that the people, communities and society as a whole were able to feel safe again.

In fact, the period following the Easter Sunday attack has proven to be a litmus test for Sri Lanka's resolve to adhere to human rights standards, while fighting terrorism, as well as to determine the strengths and shortcomings of the democratic institutions that have been consolidated in recent years. In this context, a ministerial committee headed by Foreign Minister Tilak Marapana has been established by the Cabinet to study and propose amendments to the draft counter-terrorism legislation currently under consideration by the Parliament.

Conscious of its international obligations, Sri Lanka is also consulting with partners in an effort to

bring about domestic enabling legislation that would make it compliant with more recent relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism, including on terrorist financing, border security and returning terrorist fighters and on countering violent extremism. Efforts are also under way to curb terrorists' use and abuse of the Internet and social media platforms, including by developing legislative measures and law-enforcement mechanisms to counter radical ideologies leading to violent extremism. In this context, it is necessary to develop the critical thinking of youth, strengthen community bonds, inculcate a sense of civic duty and build community resilience to mitigate the effects and influences of extremist ideologies conducive to terrorism that may escape the eye of law-enforcement authorities. In that regard, the role of the community and its resilience against local drivers of extremism are essential to preventing violent extremism.

The recovery over the past five months has demanded that we be resolute in governance. If we are to truly overcome these challenges, we must move towards incorporating a whole-of-society approach within a whole-of-Government approach.

Finally, as Sri Lanka steps into the second decade since the end of its internal armed-separatist conflict, we remain committed to promoting and safeguarding the human rights of our people through a comprehensive process that would deliver permanent peace to our country. Recent events have reaffirmed the independence of our judiciary, as well as the resilience of our democratic institutions, including public services. These events also give form to our public's trust in democracy and the rule of law, and, despite numerous challenges, the country has progressed in its course towards reconciliation and durable peace.

In that context, I am happy to note that there has been significant progress in addressing the many facets of the conflict. The Office on Missing Persons and the Office for Reparations are now fully operational. The Cabinet of Ministers is also discussing the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission. Sri Lanka has maintained constructive and continuous engagement with the United Nations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and human rights mechanisms, whereby, since the standing invitation of 2015 was made, Sri Lanka has welcomed 10 special-procedures mandate holders and working groups. Independent institutions have also played a critical role in this regard, and it is encouraging

to note that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was reaccredited as an A status national human rights institution by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in May 2018.

One would have to agree that the foregoing are not simple steps for a country to take, especially when that country has suffered 30 long years of conflict and more recent blows to its economy and polity. Promoting a peaceful and just society reconciled to itself is not only a stand-alone objective, but it is also a prerequisite for a sustainable and inclusive approach to development that leaves no one behind.

Every country has its own unique post-conflict situation. While we can learn from the experiences of others as we chart our own path to reconciliation, we are committed to finding innovative and pragmatic solutions to protect the country's national interest and the well-being of all Sri Lankans, guided by the provisions of our Constitution.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Sri Lanka's commitment to a rules-based global order. We value the spirit of multilateralism and cooperation. Although humankind faces numerous challenges, I am confident that we are well within our ability to address them in a collective, constructive and cooperative manner for the betterment of all and our future generations.

**The President:** We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

Before giving the floor to speakers in exercise of the right of reply, may I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mr. Seifi Pargou** (Islamic Republic of Iran): The statement made by the Foreign Minister of the Israeli regime (see A/74/PV.8) leaves my delegation with no choice but to exercise its right of reply. In his desperate daily struggle to remain in office and evade the court trial that awaits him, Mr. Netanyahu could not take part in the general debate at this session of the General Assembly. It is a pity because we missed an exciting performance from a stand-up comedian. Nevertheless, the Israeli Foreign Minister spared no effort to deliver the same performance as Mr. Netanyahu in his long-running annual comedy show. But this amateur comedian made a couple of colossal blunders in his

first performance. To impress the audience, he made a number of erroneous historical references and took a Persian proverb completely out of context. He said, "Do not count your chickens before they are hatched." It is not over until it is over." (*ibid.*, p. 35)

First and foremost, the officials of the Israeli regime should not consider drawing attention to historical events because of their own country's shameful 70 years of history, which could be boiled down to but a few words: occupation, brutality, massacre, and flagrant violation of the norms of humanity. Secondly, perhaps his country's strengthened ties with certain countries in the region has emboldened Mr. Katz to slip up in the use of Persian maxims. Putting the adage he used in its true and correct context, we emphatically repeat to the Israeli regime that it is indeed not over until it is over. All in all, the Minister's gaffes were comical enough that Mr. Netanyahu's absence from the general debate was not felt.

It goes without saying that Israel, the last apartheid regime and the only regime in the world that openly practices racism — and recently legalized it — seeks to ride the wave towards international legitimacy. It is a dreadfully regressive regime that pretends to be progressive and utilizes advanced technologies given to it by the United States.

It cannot be ignored that the Israeli occupation and racism lies at the heart of all conflicts in the Middle East. The repulsive Israeli occupation has brought a tremendous number of crises and sown unrest, instability and anger throughout the region. It continues to be a top spoiler of regional peace and stability. It is ironic that, in his performance, Mr. Katz spoke about developing a regional peace initiative while, at the same time, his regime is planning to annex the Jordan Valley and adding it to previously occupied Palestinian territories as an unavoidable measure that whoever ascends to the Prime Minister's office will have to take.

The baseless allegations made by Israeli officials do not fool anyone any longer. Israel's ludicrous claim to be democratic echoes a similar assertion that previously dragged the whole world into destruction. It is a democracy for racists and supremacists only — a democracy that crushes the dreams of the true owners of Palestine for self-determination. It is a mockery of democracy and a tyranny of racists. In fact, Israel is the enemy of democracy in the Middle East. It hates

democracy. There would be no room for Israel in the Middle East should democracy prevail.

With regard to the baseless allegations made earlier by the representative of the Bahraini regime (see A/74/PV.11), these accusations amount to a desperate Bahraini attempt to hide the blatant violations by its oppressive, despotic regime — indeed, violations of the very basic rights of the majority of Bahraini people by a tiny minority. By levelling those allegations, the ruling family seeks to justify its tyranny and acts of oppression and the blatant trampling of the rights of the majority of the Bahraini people, who are deprived of any meaningful participation in running the country. There should be no doubt that, as long as a small minority continues to suppress the rights of the great majority of the population, no attempt to resolve the issues at hand, including trying to blame outsiders, will ever succeed.

With regard to the repeated baseless claims about Iran's three islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs in the Persian Gulf — allegations made by the representative of the United Arab Emirates (see A/74/PV.12) — we must make it clear that this is a notable instance of attacks on the territorial integrity of my country, which has thousands of years of history. We reiterate once again that those islands have been and continue to be an inseparable part of the Iranian territory. Therefore, any claim to the contrary will be categorically rejected.

It should be also recalled that the term “Persian Gulf” has been the correct appellation for the body of the water situated between the Arabian peninsula and the Iranian plateau since 500 B.C., and so it will remain forever. It is a standardized geographical term recognized by the entire international community, including the United Nations, and should not be tampered with owing to the political wishes of some.

Since a few States have unjustly and basely blamed Iran for attacks on Saudi oil facilities, my delegation deems it necessary to point out that these allegations are unsubstantiated and false to the extent that the Saudis, who made this unfounded claim, retaliated against Al-Hudaydah in Yemen, thereby breaking a United Nations ceasefire. It is clear that even the Saudis themselves do not believe the fiction of Iranian involvement.

Taking the opportunity afforded by the right to reply, I would like to stress that, while there are deliberate provocative attempts by certain circles

inside and outside our region to manipulate maritime navigation in the Persian Gulf, all measures taken by Iranian forces there are and have always been solely aimed at enforcing the related laws and regulations in support of, inter alia, preserving law and order, protecting the marine environment, ensuring the safety and security of maritime navigation and safeguarding the flow of energy.

The Persian Gulf is a vital lifeline and therefore a national security priority for Iran, which has long ensured its maritime security. Mindful of this reality, any additional presence in the region is, by definition, a source of insecurity, notwithstanding the propaganda.

Iran will not hesitate to safeguard its security. Nations of the region will remain neighbours long after foreign forces are gone. It is high time for regional leaders to focus on regional solutions. Dialogue and non-aggression pacts are a good start.

**Mr. Hatem** (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to exercise its right of reply in response to the statement made by the representative of Iran. Perhaps the most important issue in the world today is global peace and security, on both the political and strategic fronts. It is certainly a concern for many countries in my region and across the world. Iran's increasingly aggressive attitude, seen in its support for terrorism, its threats to international navigation and global energy sources across the globe, and its interference, if not terrorist ambitions, in the internal affairs of countries in the region and around the world, are aimed at undermining regional and international peace and security.

Iran's interventions in the internal affairs of countries, its support for terrorism and the threat it poses to the security and stability of the Kingdom of Bahrain are obvious at all levels, including in explicit statements by the leaders of Iran, namely, the country's Supreme Leader and his advisers, parliamentarians and the President of the Parliament, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and his staff, as well as leaders of the Revolutionary Guard Corps. These statements often include religious references.

The terrorist groups and cells that Iran has established in Bahrain were trained in Iran and elsewhere. They are linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guards and the terrorist group Hizbullah. These groups perpetrate terrorist acts that victimize members of security corps, citizen civilians and innocent expatriates. Iran gives financial

support to these groups, provides them with smuggled weapons and explosives, and trains them on how to manufacture and store such explosives for later use by these terrorist cells.

A systematic terror campaign has been launched against the Kingdom of Bahrain and the other member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) through satellite channels that broadcast from within and outside Iran. These channels are financed by Iran with a view to undermining our national unity, bolstering religious extremism and sectarian strife, and imposing, through the formation of sectarian political alliances with groups in our country, an Iranian-style Governance of the Jurist system as an alternative to the political reform approach adopted by the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Iran is continuing to interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries, in general, and the GCC countries, in particular, by supporting terrorist groups and making aggressive attacks, without any respect whatsoever for the rules of good-neighbourliness or the principles that the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation seek to uphold. This is further proof of Iran's intent to destabilize the region.

In conclusion, I would urge the international community and all peace-loving countries to confront Iran on its destabilizing activities, including its support for terrorism in our region and around the world. I further urge the international community to press Iran to respect international law and the Charter of the United Nations, honour the sovereignty and independence of States and refrain from interfering in other countries' internal affairs. Iran must cease its aggressive policy and behaviour vis-à-vis its immediate neighbours and the region beyond.

**Ms. AlMatrooshi** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to exercise its right of reply in response to the statement of the representative of Iran. The United Arab Emirates wishes once again to stress that all three of its islands, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, located in the Arabian Gulf, are part and parcel of the territories of the United Arab Emirates. My country categorically rejects the continued Iranian occupation of these Emirati islands. We reject the Iran's unfounded claims of ownership of these islands. We also reject any attempt by Iran to impose a de facto situation by force. We call on Iran once again to respond to the sincere calls from my country

to peacefully settle this conflict, either through direct negotiation or by referring the case to the International Court of Justice, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant provisions of international law.

**Mr. Al Assiri** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to respond to the representative of Iran who has once again levelled unfounded accusations against my country. He alleges, inter alia, that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has committed violations in Al-Hudaydah, Yemen. I would like to remind the representative of Iran that the Houthi militias of Iran strengthened their position during the truce by rearming themselves, violating the ceasefire nine times prior to the Stockholm Agreement, and continuing to violate it after the Agreement. Prior to 19 January alone, the Houthis had committed over 679 violations of the Agreement, and that is only with respect to Al-Hudaydah.

I am further surprised that Iran wishes to deny us the right to defend our people, infrastructure and national security when missiles have been fired at us by the Houthi militias in Yemen. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has emphasized many times that we are not calling for war, but if war is imposed on us we will be prepared to respond.

The Iranian regime recently launched an initiative that it is calling the "Coalition of Hope". We find such an initiative ironic, even ridiculous. What kind of hope is there when Iran is launching missiles against my country? If Iran stopped firing missiles at my country and ceased to support terrorist acts against us, then hope would automatically be triggered in the region. All Iran needs to do is to stop its interference.

We do not need Iran to call for any new initiatives, especially since armed-to-the-hilt terrorist countries in our region do not usually call for peace initiatives. On the contrary, peace-loving countries that are active in the international community and that foster peace and stability are the ones that do launch peace initiatives. Iran does not fit in this latter category.

Iranians are deluded if they believe that by continuing on the path of hate they will be able to deprive us of our inherent right to defend ourselves, our peoples and our sovereignty. My country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is proud to base its arguments on proven facts that are supported by the entire international community. Unlike Iran, we are not in the habit of lying or making false allegations.



**Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I feel compelled to speak after hearing the representative of Iran mentioning my country several times. Iran is the main sponsor of terrorism in the world and has been destabilizing the situation in the Arab world, particularly in the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, as its accomplices have demonstrated in adopting the slogan of the Iranian revolution wherever its terrorist militias are found.

Regrettably, the presence of Iranian weapons, technology and expertise is felt on the ground throughout my country. As evidence of Iran's support for terrorist militias, I need only mention the fact that, on 17 August, Iran welcomed to Tehran the rebellious Houthi leader of the terrorist Ansar Allah movement and recognized him as head of a militia Government. Any country that welcomes the head of a militia Government is an official sponsor of terrorism. Iran does this shamelessly. That is why we are exercising our right to reply, and we will also exercise our rights on the ground while we continue to fight and strive until we reclaim our nation from those Iran-backed militias with the help of our brothers in the Arab coalition.

The representative of Iran alleged also that the Arab coalition and the Yemeni Government violated the Stockholm Agreement and the ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah. That is merely a lie and slander. The militias have violated the ceasefire seventeen thousand times — more than hundreds of violations every day, targeting commercial ships and placing mines in the Red Sea, thereby posing a threat to international peace and security and to navigation in the Red Sea.

Iran is also working to hinder the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, as mentioned in the reports of parties overseeing the ceasefire. We have exercised the right of reply in order to refute the fake allegations that Iran continues to disseminate through its media.

**Mr. Seifi Pargou** (Iran): I will try to be very brief. When I exercised my first right of reply, I clearly stated my delegation's position concerning unsubstantiated allegations and careless remarks made by the representatives of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. It seems that my points were not well taken by their delegations, which failed to adequately understand the gist of the issue. Mere reiteration of oft-repeated statements would be an exercise in futility and fail to lead to an explicit understanding or resolution of the contentious issues.

**Mr. Al Assiri** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like the representative of Iran to know that we did not misunderstand his statement. We know perfectly well what he said.

Would he like us to recount to those present some of the actions currently being undertaken by Iran? Iran's actions go beyond the bounds of diplomacy and the work of the United Nations. Would he like us to draw the Assembly's attention to the ongoing expulsion of Iranian diplomats from European countries — from Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Albania — for carrying out suspicious activities, shirking their diplomatic work and performing terrorist acts?

Would he like us to mention the destructive role Iran is playing in Libya and Afghanistan? Indeed, the chief of the Afghan anti-terror police has accused the Iranian Consul in Afghanistan of committing assassinations, following the disclosure of the Consul's links to terrorist attacks and the assassination of important political figures. The Afghani official added that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard also played a part in the reported attacks and assassinations, which apparently were quite professional in nature.

Everybody knows that Iran is involved in Libya. The most recent evidence of such involvement came from the seizure of an Iranian Revolutionary Guard ship owned by a company called Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines. The ship, which was transporting Iranian weapons covered by the United States sanctions, docked at Misrata seaport. The weapons were intended for militias that are wreaking havoc in Libya. The ship was flying the Iranian flag and has worked for Iran's Ministry of Defence.

We do not misunderstand what the representative of Iran said. We understand perfectly well what Iran says, just as we understand all of the terrorist acts that Iran carries out in our region.

**The President:** May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 8?

*It was so decided.*

#### **Statement by the President**

**The President:** I must begin by underscoring my appreciation for the contributions made by participants in this year's general debate. As I listened to the speakers, I formed the distinct impression that, far from

being an outmoded principle, multilateral cooperation remains an accepted and reliable method for managing relations among nations. That so many world leaders made time to participate in the deliberations that took place during high-level week is, along with the quality of engagement at the general debate, indisputable evidence of the strength of multilateralism. It is my hope that the enthusiasm displayed during the debate will prove invaluable as we approach the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, and as we join hands to respond to contemporary and unfolding global challenges.

It is perfectly legitimate to raise questions about the essence of, and the need for, multilateralism. All the same, even when we disagree on how the world should be organized to respond to, or anticipate, mounting challenges, we shall eventually come to common cause on the need for a rules-based international order. In a highly polarized world, multilateralism is the only guarantee of peace, security and sustainable development. The world will not survive for long unless we cultivate a give-and-take spirit, which is a distinct and defining attribute of multilateralism. It is gratifying to note that even those who are a bit sceptical about the direction of multilateralism acknowledge this much. Active participation in the general debate by 192 of our 193 Member States is the clearest indicator of the acknowledgement of interdependence between and among nations.

The General Assembly is the most representative body in the United Nations. However, it is disheartening that, this week, only 16 of the 192 speakers who addressed the Assembly on behalf of their States were women. When we speak of a representative United Nations, that is clearly not what we mean. By a representative United Nations, we mean a set of body that allows every human being to realize his or her fullest potential, unhindered by his or her gender or by a history of disadvantage. Gender equality in the contemporary world is still a work in progress. We therefore need to double our efforts to speed up the process of including women, not only in decision-making structures, but also in the list of speakers billed to address high-level forums. I implore each Member State to make space for women and facilitate the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

This week the world's youth made their mark. They marched in their millions all over the world and quite literally took over the General Assembly at the Climate

Action Summit. Let me assure our youth that we hear them. But the fact that I hear them does not mean that they should lower the volume. They should continue to make their voices heard at any opportunity they have.

The week began with climate action announcements and proceeded with the historic adoption of a political declaration on universal health coverage focused on prevention, promotion and quality delivery of health care (resolution 74/2). This is a remarkable achievement. Similarly, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly ended with the adoption of a political declaration entitled, "Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development" (resolution 74/4, annex).

Our work is guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but this week we paused to reflect on a watershed moment from 30 years ago, when we adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will reconvene in November to celebrate this anniversary.

It has been almost 75 years since our Organization was created to ensure peace and security in the world. This week we celebrated the International Day for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and marked the signing and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. These events crown the admirable efforts of Member States towards a nuclear-weapons-free world. I applaud each and every one of our Members for leading these important initiatives.

The High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development, the first since the adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, highlighted the need to mobilize resources to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to honour our commitments, we need an additional \$2.4 trillion. One place to start is by curbing illicit financial flows, which siphon \$2.6 trillion every year from the global economy. We must also accord high priority to good governance to ensure that corruption does not continue to derail progress and fuel conflict, as we approach the year 2030. The global financial system must meet the needs of all Member States, while also moving them away from unsustainable commitments and high levels of indebtedness.

It is noteworthy that the need for sustainable financing was highlighted at the High-level Review of Progress on Small Island Developing States Accelerated

Modalities of Action Pathway. Small island States have unquestionably shown resilience and leadership in hard times. It is now up to the world to assist them in every possible way and ensure that they participate as equal partners in global economic activities. By helping them, we are also helping ourselves and living up to the requirement of our humanity. Fortunately, partnerships underscore all of our actions here at the United Nations. We will not achieve progress without engaging all stakeholders as equal partners.

As we move beyond high-level week, I look to Members to serve as the United Nations partners in galvanizing multilateral efforts to achieve poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion. After all, these issues are shared issues. Seventy-four years after the founding of the United Nations, we remain connected by the search for solutions to current and emerging challenges, which cannot be tackled by any State Member alone. The general debate demonstrated that there is far more that unites us than divides us.

Many leaders at the general debate made references to similar challenges — conflict, violent extremism, nuclear proliferation, migration, climate change, and persistent inequalities. Member States called for a more representative Security Council and cost-effective

Secretariat and General Assembly. We have listened, and we must now take heed, as we move collectively forward through the seventy-fourth session.

In conclusion, on behalf of the entire membership of our illustrious Organization, I thank our host Government for providing the security without which the deliberations at the seventy-fourth session would have been impossible. I also salute the dedicated staff of the United Nations, especially the security and safety personnel, the staff of the Pass Office, the protocol teams, the interpreters, all staff members of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, and, of course, the Office of the President of the General Assembly. They have all demonstrated that United Nations staff members are the resource that the Organization relies upon to accomplish its mission and serve the world.

I wish to thank the various delegations and participants from civil society and youth organizations for their participation in meaningful discussions throughout high-level week. I am confident that, by keeping up this momentum and striving together, we will succeed in delivering for all. I wish those travelling back to their countries a safe trip.

*The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.*