



PERMANENT MISSION OF SLOVENIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement
by
H.E. Mr Marjan Šarec
Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia
at the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly
New York, September 27, 2019

*Mr President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a distinct honour for me to address the UN General Assembly as a unique global forum in which *all* states have an **equal voice**. The purpose of our annual debates each September is to assess the state of the world, identify trends and global challenges, and exchange ideas on possible solutions.

Clearly, the world order is in transition and international organisations are trying to follow accordingly. However, in trying to adjust some of the shifting paradigms, it would be a grave mistake to abandon the **fundamental principles** that have guided us for the past three quarters of a century. These are:

- the sovereign equality of all states,
- collective security,
- the progressive development of international law and the fulfilment of obligations in good faith,
- the peaceful resolution of disputes,
- friendly cooperation among states, and
- the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Respecting these fundamental principles under the umbrella of the United Nations prevents us from sliding into a state of global chaos and war. We live in an integrated world – one in which we all have a stake in each other's success. Our commitment to multilateralism derives from our values and a strong conviction that global issues can only be tackled collectively.

Nationalism and populism produce catchy formulas with immediate appeal. However, finding genuine solutions to our problems tends to be complex and challenging, requiring a broader consensus. This is precisely why we are here, to look for solutions to global and regional problems, through dialogue and with a mutual respect for diversity.

This week, the vast majority of UN members once again reaffirmed their support for multilateralism.

Mr President,

I wish to add Slovenia's voice to this call for effective multilateralism, more specifically focusing on three particular areas, namely the rule of law and human rights, climate change and SDGs, as well as the challenges related to new technologies.

Regarding International Law and the Universality of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

we must constantly bear in mind that for the system to work, every state must abide by and defend the **rules-based order** as is embodied in the UN Charter. Respecting **international law** is not a matter of opportunism or political will; it is a legal obligation and the *sine qua non* of the international system. Therefore, it is imperative to push back against attempts at undermining international law. A respect for international commitments and the implementation of international judicial decisions is fundamental.

Over the past seven decades, **human rights protection** has seen remarkable progress. However, this progress should never be taken for granted. We have to resist all attempts to weaken the existing human rights protection. This is one of the greatest assets we can and must pass down to our children.

However, we must not only create opportunities for the **young**, but also appropriately address the **ageing** of many societies and the rights of the elderly. Slovenia will continue to support the idea of a dedicated international legal instrument on the rights of older persons. Allow me to recall an African proverb: "Those who respect the elderly pave their own road toward success."

The shrinking space for **human rights activists** around the world is alarming. All human rights belong to all people. Any identity-based discrimination and violence is utterly unacceptable.

I say this looking ahead to next year's 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The important advances made in **gender equality** and the **empowerment of women** must be protected. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are among the cornerstones of gender equality. We must not forget that women's potential is still underutilised in too many countries.

Mr President,

Gross human rights violations tend to be **early indicators of emerging conflicts**. Hence, a swift and firm response to large-scale human rights violations is vital to prevent crises from developing into fully-fledged conflicts. I therefore call on the UN Security Council members to uphold the Code of Conduct regarding mass atrocity situations and to refrain from using the veto in situations of mass atrocities.

Slovenia is committed to **conflict prevention** and to **mediation**. Prevention reduces human suffering. We have seen it work. When we take early action and stand united, we save lives. My country is determined to contribute to prevention efforts, in particular by

supporting the human rights pillar of the UN, international criminal justice, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Specifically, Slovenia will continue to support the stability in, and European integration of, the **Western Balkans**. While supporting their prospects for EU membership, we actively encourage regional cooperation, support regional reconciliation and promote youth cooperation.

Due to its strong deterrent effect, ensuring **justice and accountability** for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law is important from an ethical, legal and practical perspective. As a member of the Secretary-General's Circle of Leadership on the prevention of, and response to, **sexual exploitation and abuse** in UN operations, I wish to call for a concerted action to end sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system. Prevention and justice for survivors must be our first priority in this context.

To assist states in holding perpetrators accountable, Slovenia – together with several other countries – has brought forward an initiative on negotiating a **Multilateral Treaty for Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition for Domestic Prosecution of the Most Serious International Crimes**. We thank all 69 states that have expressed their support for the initiative so far; we sincerely hope to obtain further support in the months leading up to the Treaty negotiations which begin next spring.

Mr President,

The two topics I would also like to particularly address are Climate Change and Sustainable Development.

The **climate crisis** is evolving faster than predicted. By crossing several planetary boundaries, we have already taken away some of the resources that belong to future generations.

The unprecedented mobilisation of **youth** on a global scale demands immediate action, followed by the Secretary-General's initiative to convene the Climate Action Summit, has finally generated a sense of urgency. The COP25 held later this year in Chile will be of critical relevance to humanity and our planet. We owe it to our children to not side-track from the Paris Agreement. We need to recognise **the right to a healthy living environment**. Climate change is a case in point for the need for effective multilateralism.

The depletion of natural resources, in particular water, perpetuates the inequalities and risk of conflicts. It also forces us to rethink our current economic models and make them sustainable. The **circular economic model** where resources are reduced, reused and recycled is inextricably linked to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

For Slovenia, the transition to a sustainable and green economy is a strategic priority. Slovenia will continue to support the **implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change**; in this context, we will pay special attention to sustainable use and the

management of natural resources, in particular water, the promotion of a circular economy and the preservation and protection of biodiversity.

In addition, Slovenia will continue to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with a sense of urgency. It will present the progress made over the last four years in the Second Voluntary Review at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2020.

We need to make every effort to eliminate all forms of poverty and inequality, promote peaceful and inclusive societies, and mitigate the root causes of migration in developing countries. The issue of mass migration is neither a new challenge, nor can it be simply resolved overnight. It is an issue that should be addressed responsibly from the point of view of human rights and solidarity, with a clear focus on prevention – that is by appropriately addressing the situation at its source.

Mr President,

I believe we cannot have this important yearly discussion without acknowledging New Technologies.

Technological advancement brings people across the world closer to one another and to a greater extent than ever imagined; it provides immense benefits in terms of increased productivity and a higher quality of living, but also entails new risks to countries and individuals.

People are increasingly reaping the benefits of **artificial intelligence**. According to estimates, as much as 80% of future work will be done by AI. It is bound to deeply affect the various facets of our daily life and fundamentally transform our societies. We need to be better prepared for the challenge of 'algocracy', which will include the regulation of the impact of AI on human rights protection.

I am particularly pleased to announce the proposal to set up, with UNESCO's backing, Europe's first international artificial intelligence research centre in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana. The aim of the centre will be to provide an open environment focusing on the governance and policies surrounding artificial intelligence. In this respect, I sincerely hope to be able to count on your valuable support at the upcoming UNESCO General Conference in November.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that, at this critical time, we must go forward in the pursuit of our ideas and ideals, not abandon them. We need to give expression to our best hopes, not our deepest fears. We have to provide leadership that is strong enough to recognise that nations share common interests, and people share universal principles and ideas in our common humanity.

Thank you, Mr President.