



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail [australia@un.int](mailto:australia@un.int)

150 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 [www.australia-unscc.gov.au](http://www.australia-unscc.gov.au)

Thursday 25 September 2014

## UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### Statement by The Hon Tony Abbott MP Prime Minister

Check against delivery

---

In what can seem darkening times, I want to begin with a message of hope.

Amidst all our problems: the murderous rage of ISIL in Syria and Iraq, Russian aggression in Ukraine, the spread of Ebola in West Africa, and the stubborn sluggishness of many economies, let me start with a small but telling illustration of nations working together to serve our common humanity.

Last March, at the height of the search for missing Flight MH 370, I went to Pearce airbase in Western Australia to thank all the aviators involved.

There were personnel from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and the United States, countries that are accustomed to working together; and also from China, Japan and Korea, countries whose relations sometimes labour under the weight of historical grievance.

On this occasion, though, tragedy and a daunting challenge had drawn out the best in everyone.

This organisation, in fact, is founded on the principle that we should work together for the common good; and that, over time, talking together and working together will improve our capacity for living together.

Like any institution, the United Nations is an imperfect instrument.

Still, it's better than might-is-right and it gives good arguments the best chance to prevail.

Despite faults and failures, the UN has worked for peace and progress over nearly 70 years and Australia has been proud to play its part – starting in 1946 when we held the first presidency of the Security Council and worked with seven other nations to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At the heart of this body is the principle that we should act towards others as we'd have them act towards us.

For almost seven decades, Australia has believed in the United Nations' potential and supported its work.

Keeping commitments, valuing human life, protecting property and extending freedom are universal aspirations, not just Australian ones.

Since 1947, we have provided more than 65,000 personnel to more than 50 multilateral peace and security operations.

We are not a country accustomed to turning back once we've put our hand to the plough; we've had blue beret personnel in the Middle East since 1956 and in Cyprus since 1964.

When leadership is needed, we step up, as we did in Bougainville, in Timor-Leste and in Solomon Islands.

In Korea, Cambodia, Kuwait and Afghanistan; in Somalia and Sierra Leone and in other troubled places, Australians have lent a hand under the UN's banner.

We have only 21 personnel in South Sudan but have conducted an airlift of equipment that has supported a much larger force.

With just 24 million people, Australia is a relatively small country but we are the world's 12th largest economy with global interests and with some global reach.

We're strong enough to be useful but pragmatic enough to know our limits.

Under successive governments, for more than 100 years, Australia's determination has been to advance our interests, protect our citizens and uphold our values.

We have never believed that we can save the world single-handedly; nor have we shrunk from shouldering our responsibilities.

After the 2004 East Asian tsunami, we committed \$1 billion to Indonesia.

We were one of the first countries to arrive with help in Japan after the 2011 earthquake; and in the Philippines after the 2013 typhoon.

So far, we've pledged \$8 million towards combatting the Ebola outbreak and dozens of Australian health professionals are working with international agencies in the region.

To us, this is all part of being a good global citizen.

This July, we were pleased to sponsor Security Council resolution 2166 and to work with the Dutch and the Malaysians to investigate the site and to return our dead after Flight MH17 was shot down by Russian backed rebels over eastern Ukraine.

We're grateful for the help that Ukraine gave us and are naturally sympathetic to a country struggling to preserve its independence and territorial integrity against a bully.

With the Dutch and the Malaysians, we will do everything we can to ensure that the investigation is not undermined and that the crime is not covered up because that's our duty to the 38 Australians murdered in this atrocity.

Right now, an Australian force has been deployed to the Middle East so that we might join a coalition to disrupt and degrade the ISIL terrorist movement at the request of the Iraqi government.

One of our prime ministers once talked about our country's great objective, our "light on the hill", as he put it, to work for the betterment of mankind, not just at home but wherever we can lend a helping hand.

To build this better world, we need to respond sensibly to the problems before us (whether through bodies such as the UN or in coalition with like-minded countries); and we need to work purposefully to create stronger and more resilient people and communities.

A stronger economy won't solve every problem; but it will make almost every problem easier to tackle.

Richer people aren't necessarily better people; but the problems of plenty are invariably easier to deal with than those of want.

As this year's chair of the G20, Australia is determined to promote private-sector-led growth: growth, because this is the best way to generate jobs and improve everyone's quality of life; private sector-led, because profitable private businesses are the best source of real, sustainable wealth.

Freer trade, more investment in infrastructure, a modern and fair international tax system, stronger global economic institutions and a more resilient financial sector are all parts of our G20 agenda to strengthen the world economy.

Rather than preaching, we're trying to lead by example.

Australia has abolished the carbon tax, abolished the mining tax, provided environmental approvals for \$800 billion worth of new projects and begun the task of eliminating our budget deficit within four years.

We've finalised a series of trade deals because every time a country trades with another, wealth increases, and when wealth increases countries grow stronger.

Our G20 goal is to boost output by an extra two per cent over the next five years to create millions of jobs and to generate trillions in wealth right around the world.

Likewise, the post-2015 Development Agenda should also focus on economic growth because growth makes every other social goal, even tackling climate change, easier to accomplish.

To people who don't know where their next meal is coming from, talk of economic growth can seem ignorant or indulgent.

But "economic growth" is really just economists' shorthand for more jobs, higher pay, new industries, and the better life that only greater wealth can provide.

Economic growth might seem an inadequate vision for a politician but it's what allows millions more people to create for themselves their own vision of how their lives can be better.

To anyone who doubts that stronger economic growth can be achieved, I say "look at the countries of East Asia".

In scarcely two generations, the rise of Asia has driven the greatest social and economic transformation in history.

People live longer; they're better educated, are wealthier and, yes, enjoy freedom and stability that their parents could only dream of.

In Japan, Korea and now China; in India and increasingly in Indonesia; many hundreds of millions of people have been lifted from poverty to the middle class.

This, almost certainly, is the greatest and fastest advance in human welfare of all time.

While all governments, Australia's included, could always be better, smarter and more compassionate, no one should be blind to the great progress that's occurred.

We live in the most remarkable age in human history.

For all that remains to be done, we have seen more change for the better than at any other time.

As this General Assembly meets, with such pressing issues before it, our challenge – as always – is to realise our best hopes and to be our best selves.

Australians have two defining characteristics: we believe in a “fair go” because innate decency demands that every person have a chance to contribute.

We also believe in “having a go” because rolling up your sleeves will always produce a better result than standing on the sidelines complaining.

This readiness to make an effort for a good cause is why Australia feels so comfortable in this body and is so ready to contribute to its work.

We should put no limits on what we can achieve, especially when we work together, trust people and are faithful to our deepest values.

Every country counts.

Every argument must be weighed.

Every person has equal rights and dignity.

Every person deserves respect.

All people are entitled to make their own choices – provided these don't infringe the rights of others.

These are the principles which this organisation embodies, on which the future of humanity rests.

Thank you Madam President.