



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

2 November 2018

Excellency,

I am pleased to present my synopsis of the General Debate of the 73rd session, in my capacity as the President of the General Assembly.

The synopsis reflects a renewed interest and commitment to multilateralism. In this regard, I look forward to working with you to take forward world leaders' desire to "Making the United Nations relevant to all people: Global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies".

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "MF ESPINOSA".

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

Synopsis of the General Debate
73rd session of the General Assembly
25 September – 1 October 2018

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly convened its General Debate for the 73rd session, from Tuesday 25 September to Monday 1 October 2018. The debate has set the tone for the Assembly's work for the session, highlighting agreement on the irreplaceability of the United Nations. Throughout the debate, world leaders, in almost total unanimity, highlighted the critical importance of multilateralism and international cooperation in addressing global challenges and promoting human rights, sustainable development, security and stability.

They identified a series of challenges humanity is facing, ranging from conflicts to terrorism, nuclear proliferation and colonization, as well as multiple threats related to disasters and climate change, increasing inequalities and poverty, migration and refugees. Leaders warned against the pursuit of unilateral solutions to challenges that are universal in nature, which could lead to isolation and risks of confrontation.

Most of the leaders highlighted the potential of the UN to play its role through the promotion of dialogue and multilateralism. Global challenges must be tackled collectively and the United Nations is offering the venue, the expertise, the tools and mechanisms to achieve this noble objective. This cannot be done without restoring trust and confidence and promoting inclusiveness and dialogue which remain key to strengthening multilateralism.

Statistics

The 193 Member States of the organization as well as the observers, namely the Holy See, the State of Palestine and the European Union addressed the Assembly. With the participation of 126 Heads of State and Government, that makes it the highest-level attendance at that level at the UN headquarters since the 2005 World Summit. Furthermore, 5 Vice Presidents and 54 Ministers addressed the Assembly.

On the margin of the high-level general debate, six high level meetings were convened, either mandated by the General Assembly or initiated by the Secretary General, including:

- The Nelson Mandela Summit in honor of the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, on 24 September (General Assembly Resolution 72/243)
- The high-level meeting on financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations, on 24 September
- The high-level meeting convened by the Secretary General on his Action for Peacekeeping initiative, on 25 September
- The high-level plenary meeting to promote the International Day for the total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, on 26 September

- The high-level meeting on the Fight against Tuberculosis, on 26 September (General Assembly Resolution 72/268)
- The high-level meeting of the General Assembly to undertake a Comprehensive Review of the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, on 27 September (General Assembly Resolution 72/274)

Furthermore, 560 other meetings were convened by regional and other political groups, individual Member States and the UN System as well as 1676 bilateral meetings. This tremendous multilateral activity was widely covered by world media, including through 310,000 articles, from 21,000 news sources in 75 languages across 191 countries.

The General Assembly Debate will enter history as one of the busiest and most active in recent memory. While the growing number of parallel meetings and activities to the General Debate can be seen as a reflection of the importance of this space for world affairs as well as for leaders, it is also posing a serious challenge in terms of attendance of the debate itself. Indeed, it is important to preserve the primacy and deference of the General Debate, as the unique forum for world leaders to discuss the most pressing global issues. This cannot be achieved without making sure that parallel activities are managed rationally, in order to avoid impacting negatively the Debate.

Main issues and topics

In terms of topics and issues raised by world leaders, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains the most frequently mentioned issue throughout the debate. Indeed around 80% of speakers (158) made a reference to this topic, including through presenting their national plans and policies to achieve the agreed development goals and also through highlighting their Voluntary National Reviews made at the last three High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development review sessions (2016-2017-2018) or planned for the upcoming session.

Health related matters were central in many interventions, in the context of the two high-level events on Non-Communicable Diseases and Tuberculosis. Delegations underscored that these diseases and others are threatening to jeopardize the attainment of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, many other development-related themes were central in delegations' interventions, including the importance of trade for development and international cooperation, which is considered as a strong engine for growth and poverty eradication, as well as issues related to countries in specific situations, including Small Islands Developing States, Least Developed Countries, Land-locked Developing Countries, Middle Income Countries and African countries.

Climate change constituted a critical topic at the General Debate, as it received the second largest mention by world leaders, with almost 75% (146) speakers making reference to it. Most of the speakers referred to the Paris Climate Agreement as the main framework to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change and ensure sustainability. They warned

against the impacts of climate change and the increasing frequency of climate hazards and disasters.

Delegations reiterated their firm commitment to implementing the Agreement in order to meet the objective of keeping global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. In this context, speakers referred to the important upcoming meetings, including UNFCCC COP24 next December in Poland, the mandated General Assembly High-level Event on the protection of climate as well as the Climate Summit to be convened by the Secretary General in 2019.

The phenomenon of terrorism continued to figure prominently in the General Debate. Indeed, it ranked third on the list of the most mentioned topics by world leaders, with 123 speakers, which represents 62% of the interventions. Delegations reiterated their strong call for an effective global response to address this threat to the entire humanity.

Reforming the United Nations, in order to respond to evolving global needs and making it relevant to all people, has been a recurrent topic in world leaders' statements. More than half of speakers (101) made a general reference to the Secretary General's three track reforms, namely restructuring the peace and security architecture, management as well as the repositioning of the UN development system. Leaders expressed support for the reforms, among others. Furthermore, more specific comments were made on Security Council Reform (80 speakers) and the revitalization of the General Assembly (11 speakers).

Migration also figured prominently in the deliberations, especially in the context of the upcoming Conference in Marrakech to adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, with 100 (51%) speakers mentioning the subject. Most delegations expressed their attachment to the negotiated outcome document, to be formally endorsed in Marrakech, as the first ever global agreement to recognize and address the challenges faced by migrants, as well as countries of origin, transit and destination.

The theme proposed by the President of the General Assembly for the 73rd session "Making the United Nations Relevant to All People: Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies", for its part, received wide support from the membership, with almost half of world leaders (96 speakers) specifically addressing it.

Issues related to international peace and security occupied a large portion of the speeches of world leaders. They focused on the need to strengthen efforts related to the prevention of conflicts and mediation and to make prevention a priority. Concerns were expressed over the need to strengthen the role of the United Nations, in order to meet expectations of people for peace and address the most pressing issues. In this context, world leaders referred to some of the most pressing issues at the national and regional levels, including, inter alia, the situation in Syria (74 speakers), Palestinian question (84 speakers), Yemen (44 speakers), Libya (30

speakers), South Sudan (28 speakers), Iraq (20 speakers), Afghanistan (17 speakers), Somalia (14 speakers), Mali (12 speakers), Central African Republic (11 speakers) and DRC (10 speakers).

Delegations also addressed other global issues, ranging from peacekeeping (80 speakers) to peacebuilding (27 speakers) and nuclear matters (58 speakers). Issues related to gender were also prominent in the discussions, from different perspectives, including gender equality (58 speakers) as well as women, peace and security (7 speakers).