

**Statement
by the President of Ukraine during the General Debate
of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly**

“Making the United Nations relevant to all people: Global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies”

Distinguished Madam President,

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Ukraine, I congratulate Madam President on the election as President of the 73rd session of the General Assembly.

We support outlined priorities and are ready to do our share in translating them into reality.

Our deliberations are taking place at a defining moment for the Organization.

Despite the universal appeal for peace and declared commitment to uphold it, wars and armed conflicts remain our reality.

Conflicts are the main reason for the rise in refugees and displaced persons worldwide to the unprecedented figure of 65.5 million.

Since no peace means no development, hundreds of millions are doomed to misery.

The international security environment seemed rock-solid less than two decades ago. Now it has descended into a volatile and increasingly disturbing state where both traditional and hybrid threats are challenging stability of our societies.

Too often lofty rhetoric on peace, respect for international law, and commitment to human rights remains just that – rhetoric, nice sounding words, politically correct messages, which, however, are not backed by concrete actions.

We may become tempted to talk about achievements or grand plans for the future.

However, from our perspective, addressing fundamental problems that the UN and the international community as a whole face is much more important.

We shall never forget that the *raison d'être* of this Organization is to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”.

Madam President,

Unfortunately, my fellow citizens have become a part of that one-fifth of the world population who is experiencing the horrors of war.

As I deliver my speech, reports have brought a sad news about another human life just lost on the frontlines of the war inflicted upon my country by the permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Yesterday, and the day before, several families, again, were struck by grief, as their loved ones perished under Russia's hostile attacks.

Moscow turns Ukrainian to orphans.

It tortures our patriots in its prisons.

Over 1.5 million people became internally displaced persons.

They still can't return to their homes.

Russia constantly multiplies the human tragedy, which lately received a new dimension: ecological.

It poisons the Ukrainian soil and causes an environmental disaster not only in the occupied Crimea, but in Donbas as well.

This has been a daily reality for Ukrainians for four years now. Thousands of deaths, destruction, displacement and human suffering.

For my fellow citizens, these years have become a tremendous challenge – a test for their determination and solidarity, resilience and faith.

Let us not forget what this war is about.

Ukraine made a sovereign decision to live its way and promote the Free World based on democratic values and rules.

Russia punishes Ukraine for this decision.

It kills. It ruins homes. It lies on industrial scale.

It pretends that Ukraine, as well as Georgia “attacked themselves”.

Do we know which neighbor of Russia will “attack itself” next?

Or will the world be “comfortably numb” in a hope that “the next one won’t be me”?

As we defend Ukraine’s land and our free choice, as we counter the resurging neo-imperialist power willing to divide the world anew – we defend the Free World.

The UN shall not be silent, when the values and principles rooted in its Charter and the entire body of international law are being violated by a veto country.

This is not just a challenge, but our chance to make the United Nations relevant and to make the motto of this Assembly session work.

Madam President,

How did such a deterioration in the world affairs happen?

Many assumed that the respect for peace and international law is a constant given.

Developments on international stage over the last decade have seriously undermined this confidence.

Appeasement and quick fixes to difficult problems have proven to be a false option.

It has proven that staying comfortably silent when international norms are breached does not stop but encourages the offender to continue its destructive policies.

Your silence is exactly what the Kremlin weaponizes against Ukraine and, ultimately, against all of us!

It’s naïve to believe that safe shores will always be around.

There will be no safe shores, shall we allow someone to feel that HE is not bound by any norms or restrictions. That HE has a right to reshape the international system to his liking. That HIS interests are more legitimate than ours.

In the absence of a strong and united reaction, such extremely irresponsible and selfish actor resorts to the tactic of further escalation, creating new crises, raising the stakes, blackmailing other countries and even entire international organizations.

All in an effort “to get away with murder”.

We shall not allow this to happen. We shall bring the world back on track.

What is the cure?

In one word: responsibility.

The international community’s ability to ensure systemic and inevitable responsibility for each and every violation of international laws - first and foremost norms and principles of the UN Charter - is the benchmark indicating how successful we, as the family of nations, can be in achieving common goals.

Ensuring responsibility is never an easy feat.

Let me be clear on this point: Nothing will stop Moscow from continuing its aggressive expansionist policies if it does not face a united stand of the international community, if punishment for its actions does not become inevitable.

It is due to the lack of relevant punishment that after Georgia came Ukraine, that after Lytvinenko came Skrypals, that after Aleppo came Idlib...

Kremlin has no intention to stop. After occupation of Crimea, it aims now at occupation of the Sea of Azov between Ukraine and Russia.

Having illegally constructed a bridge across the Kerch Strait, Russia launched a systematic disruption of freedom of international navigation through the Kerch Strait for Ukrainian and foreign ships.

Such brutal actions must be rejected as illegal, including under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. They require a strong response, including an enhanced sanctions policy and other targeted measures.

Efficiency of international actions often falls short of expectations and the relevance of the United Nations itself is questioned.

We must admit that the responsibility for fixing the current state of affairs rests with all of us collectively and each of us individually.

If we are committed to building peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies, we protect the UN Charter, uphold its norms and principles, take resolute action to restore justice.

Let me say it more precisely – the beautiful language of the Charter worth nothing if it is not enforced. No more words, time for deeds!

The United Nations must gain momentum as there are continued attempts to ruin the rules-based international order and revise internationally recognized state borders by force.

This dangerous slide towards the world with no civilized rules has to be stopped. In this regard, there is a need to revitalize and strengthen the role of the General Assembly in the sphere of international peace and security.

With conflicts spreading, we have to ensure maximum flexibility and comprehensiveness of the agenda of the General Assembly, which is the only inclusive and chief policy-making forum.

That is why Ukraine introduced the item “The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine” in the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly.

Member States should be provided with every possibility for in-depth considerations of all urgent situations that require attention of the international community.

As outlined by the General Assembly President, we have to “facilitate quick and effective responses of the General Assembly to emergency situations”.

Ukraine, as one of Vice-Presidents of the 73rd session, stands ready to contribute to that.

As Member States, we “conferred on the Security Council the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”.

What shall we do if a veto holding member of the Security Council uses this right not to help international peace and stability, but to help itself escape from responsibility?

It is time to say that the abuse of veto right is a brake that often does not allow our Organization to really act.

We believe that the progress on the Security Council reform will be an important contribution to the ongoing UN-wide change.

We support launching text-based talks within the Intergovernmental Negotiations and are ready to engage constructively in this process.

We also expect that the ongoing reform of the peace and security pillar envisaged by the Secretary-General, with the support of the General Assembly, would contribute to the speed and abilities of the Organization to react to the emerging threats to international peace and security.

Ukraine fully shares the approach of the Secretary-General on the peacekeeping activity of the Organization within his concept of the "Action for Peacekeeping (A4P)". It is a timely opportunity for Member States and the UN leadership to consider measures leading to effecting real changes in the UN peacekeeping.

The very same peacekeeping that Ukraine has been asking the UN to deploy on its territory since April 2015, when I addressed my request, supported by the Parliament of Ukraine, to the President of the Security Council, to the President of the General Assembly and to the UN Secretary-General.

After the failure of the UN to prevent aggression against Ukraine, we still hoped that the UN would help settling the conflict by deploying an UN-mandated multinational peacekeeping force in the occupied Donbas.

A mission, with a strong mandate and broad responsibilities to help bring peace on the Ukrainian soil. Rather than to freeze the conflict or cement the presence of the aggressor and its proxies in Donbas.

We firmly count on further progress on this important issue.

After all, and perfectly in line with the topic of this General Debate – "Making the United Nations relevant to all people" – it is through such a UN Security Council-mandated PKO that the UN would save countless lives and prevent further sufferings.

Madam President,

We remain as determined as ever to keep defending every inch of our territory against the aggression. At the same time, we will continue exploring all available means to end the conflict peacefully and restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Let me stress – Ukraine has always put legal and diplomatic means of conflict resolution first.

We have prioritized multilateralism, by turning for support of the United Nations, OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international organizations, fora and mechanisms. And we will continue along that path.

Moscow shall feel the strength of the rule of international law.

We initiated several legal cases against the Russian side in international courts. On some of them we have already achieved important results.

In particular, in the beginning of 2017 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Russia to lift the ban on activities on Mejlis – representative body of Crimean Tatars in the occupied Crimea.

However, Russia continues to ignore the ruling demonstrating its disregard not only to its international obligations but to the Court as well.

Another important element of our case in the ICJ it is the downing of MH17 in 2014 and the role of the Russian Federation in this tragedy.

It is important that Australia and the Netherlands recently joined Ukraine in its efforts to bring Russia to account.

The international community repeatedly calls Russia to acknowledge its responsibility and change its destructive behaviour in Ukraine and elsewhere.

We know that following the legal path is a lengthy process, but we are confident that at the end it will allow us to achieve justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been almost four years since Russia's attempted annexation and illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol.

Under Russian occupation, Crimea has turned into a military stronghold threatening security and stability in the entire wider Black Sea region.

We believe that increasing militarization of Crimea deserves the General Assembly's close attention and prompt reaction.

Russia's aggressive policies as well as its arrogance in using lethal weapons multiply the threat.

In this regard, Ukraine counts on your active support for the relevant resolution during this session.

Since the first day of the illegal occupation of Crimea, Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians have faced repressions and discrimination. There are many cases of murders, tortures, harassment and arrests under fabricated charges. The list of hostages and victims of the Russian occupation regime in Crimea is getting longer almost every day.

The Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar identities seem to be a criminal offence in today's reality of the occupied peninsula.

Crimean farmer Volodymyr Balukh was arrested and sentenced to 5 years in prison for raising a Ukrainian flag upon his private residence.

Crimean film director Oleg Sentsov remains behind the bars in a remote penal colony in northern Russia serving a 20-years prison term on fabricated charges.

Both Oleg and Volodymyr are balancing between life and death as they remain on a hunger strike.

I highly appreciate a remarkable manifestation of support and unity throughout the world to seek freedom for these brave persons.

Unfortunately, Kremlin remains blind and deaf to these appeals of the international community and many of Russia's intellectuals.

I call upon UN Member States to strengthen their efforts in demanding respect for human rights in the temporarily occupied Crimea through the adoption of the respective UNGA resolution.

There are also dozens of Ukrainians held by the occupants in Donbas since the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014.

Ukrainian soldier Serhii Glondar has never seen his youngest daughter, as he has been held captive for three and a half years.

All Ukrainian proposals to exchange the Russian citizens convicted for crimes against our sovereignty and territorial integrity for the Ukrainian citizens held as political prisoners by Kremlin remained unanswered.

It's just another side of Russia's recklessness: first sending and inciting own citizens to this war – and simply abandoning them afterwards.

This is the thing about today's Russia: they don't care.

They don't care about suffering.

They don't care about truth.

They don't care about law.

They think that their military might and status in the UN give them this right.

It's up to us to prove them wrong.

It's up to us to MAKE THEM CARE.

Otherwise what's the idea of us being here?

Otherwise what's the difference between the era before the UN and with the UN?

In a broader context, Ukraine has always considered protection of human rights as one of the cornerstones of the UN activities.

Sustainable peace and security cannot be achieved in isolation from human rights.

We therefore support the efforts to bring back human rights issues to the UN Security Council and to promote close cooperation among all relevant UN bodies in this area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My country is delivering on its commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ukraine's economy grew in the second quarter of 2018 at a 3.8% annual rate. This marks the tenth straight quarter of growth that is a clearly sustainable trend. The GDP increase was helped by macroeconomic stabilization, improved investment climate and clean-up of the banking sector.

Ukraine is demonstrating the best dynamics in growth among the emerging markets.

Despite heavy security and defense expenses totaling more than 6% of its GDP, Ukraine is undergoing fundamental transformations on social, economic and political tracks.

We have consistently implemented progressive reforms – ranging from judicial, education, healthcare, public administration reforms to carrying out decentralization and fighting corruption.

In 2019-2021, Ukraine will take over an important responsibility as member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Based on its extensive recent experience, my country looks forward to using its membership to strengthen the role of the Council in following-up and reviewing 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, particularly when it comes to conflict and post-conflict settings.

Among 17 Sustainable Development Goals Ukraine particularly welcomes the UN initiatives aimed at reducing global hunger.

Today, when more than 850 million people in the world are starving, my country cannot stand idle and is ready to offer the world its help in addressing the issue of food security.

Ukraine, like nobody, knows the price of this tragedy.

This November we will mark 85th Anniversary of one of the deadliest crimes of the 20th century – the crime of Holodomor, mass starvation in Ukraine artificially organized by the Stalinist regime. It took lives of several millions of Ukrainians.

In this regard, I would like to renew my appeal to the Assembly to mark one of the biggest tragedies in human history by adopting a dedicated declaration.

Madam President,

Our Organization is only as strong as we want and allow it to be.

Therefore, our full support and strong political will are required to ensure that the United Nations remains relevant in today's uncertain and turbulent times.

Relevant, as you rightly put it in the theme of this debate, to all people.

It is our mission and shared responsibility to empower the United Nations to do what is expected of the Organization.

To do it through our global leadership based on shared values – freedom, the rule of law and tolerance.

Thank you for your attention.