

**Opening of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly**  
**Statement by President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly**  
**General Assembly Hall, United Nations**  
**New York**  
**12 September 2017**

*Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Mr. Secretary-General, ladies and gentlemen,*

I'm addressing you today for the first time as President of the General Assembly. I want to say, again, that this is a great honor for me. I have always believed strongly in the power of multilateralism – in compromise over conflict. This belief will be tested, from time to time, during the 72nd Session. But, ultimately, I am confident it will be reaffirmed. It is also a great honor for my country, Slovakia. We see this as a testament to our commitment to the values and principles of the United Nations.

I would like to thank my predecessor, His Excellency, Mr. Peter Thomson. I feel lucky to be able to take the helm of a ship from such an able captain! I hope to maintain the high standards he has set for the work of the General Assembly. Throughout the 72nd Session, I look forward to working closely with the Secretary-General, His Excellency, Mr. Antonio Guterres. The General Assembly will play a vital role in making his vision for a better UN - and therefore a better world - a reality. I also look forward to being advised by all of you. Consultations with Member States will be a standing priority for me and my Office.

*Excellencies,*

The 72nd Session will be a year of “firsts”:

- we will negotiate the first intergovernmental compact on migration
- we will receive the first report from the Secretary-General, and convene the first high-level event, linked to the landmark resolutions on Sustaining Peace, which were adopted last year
- soon many states will sign the first agreement on the elimination of nuclear weapons, as well as the first international compact to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping.

But it will also be a year of follow-up. This will arguably be even more important. “Firsts” bring photographers and celebrations. Follow-up often comes with challenges and complications:

- Over the coming year, we will need to maintain the momentum in implementing - and financing - the Sustainable Development Goals.
- We must work to ensure that the Paris Climate Agreement is integrated into national, regional and international frameworks.

We must follow our commitments from yesterday with actions now. We cannot let reports or events or resolutions of the past be relegated to the UN's archives. We must continue to work to implement their recommendations.

Another major item for the 72nd session is UN reforms. In some ways, they will represent a first. Reforms will, indeed, mean something new. They will allow the UN to work in a way it never has before. However, reforms will also represent follow-up. The UN today looks very different from that which was established in 1945. This organization has been reforming and evolving over the years. We have seen this through the General Assembly's revitalization process. We must thus see UN reforms as an opportunity to contribute to an ongoing process - but with a fresh outlook.

I have been reflecting carefully on my priorities as President of the 72nd Session. These have been greatly influenced by consultations with many of you. I will outline them in detail at the opening of the General Debate next week. Now, however, I want to speak briefly about a few principles that will guide my work over the coming year.

First, people. Sometimes the work of the United Nations can be very complex. But the reason for its establishment is simple. The UN was created for people. Its job is to help people who are striving for peace and a decent life, on a sustainable planet. The people who need the United Nations the most are not sitting in this hall today. They are not involved in the negotiation of resolutions. They do not take the floor at high-level events. It is one of the tasks of the General Assembly to make sure that their voices can still be heard.

Second, balance. It would be impossible to choose simply one priority for the UN to focus on this year. Opinions would differ from region to region - or indeed person to person. Someone who has seen rising sea levels threaten to claim their village could say climate change. Someone who has lost a loved one in a bomb blast could say counter-terrorism. Someone who is suffering from persecution for their beliefs could say human rights. During the 72nd Session, I will work towards representing all these viewpoints. There must be balance in the work of the General Assembly.

The third principle is quality. This should be our objective - especially in terms of events. The majority of UN Member States do not have large representations here in New York. Some of them - particularly smaller states - struggle to stay on top of the UN's busy calendar. For the 72nd Session, I intend to have a streamlined agenda, and to avoid placing more burden on Member States. The quality of dialogue and outcomes is more important than launching new initiatives.

And, finally, transparency. This is a principle I have been committed to throughout my career. I'm sure all of you know where my office is, on the second floor. My door will always be open to you. Even if sometimes I have to close it physically - because I suspect there will be a lot of noise and activity among my team this year - it is open in spirit!

*Excellencies,*

Let us not forget the significance of what we are doing here. Next week 193 Member States will come together in this hall. Even representatives of countries with profound disagreements on fundamental issues will sit side-by-side. We will not all agree. We are likely to hear different - sometimes conflicting - positions expressed from this podium. But I am confident that the overarching principles of the primacy of diplomacy, and mutual respect, will prevail.

To help us meet this goal, I suggest one simple rule - to treat every speaker on this podium as if he or she is our own head of delegation. This will not only conserve the dignity of the General Debate - it will also allow us to listen, learn and participate to the best possible extent. We will face many challenges throughout the 72nd Session. But:

- as long as we can all come together here
- as long as we can all stand for equal time on this podium
- as long as we can use these meeting rooms to talk to each other and reach compromises in good will

...then we all have the collective opportunity to use the United Nations to make the world a better, and more peaceful, place. If we don't do this, the failure will lie with us - not the United Nations.

*Thank you all again. Now, let us begin the 72nd Session of the General Assembly!*